

UNDERSTANDING SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS THAT FOSTER RESILIENCE FOR  
BLACK MALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN PSYCHOLOGY

by

DAVID CARLTON STANLEY JR

(Under the Direction of Edward A. Delgado-Romero)

ABSTRACT

Although a large body of research exists explaining how there are few Black men in the helping professions (Beasley, Miller, & Cokley, 2015), there is little information about the sociocultural influences that support the resilience of Black men in doctoral programs. A phenomenological study was conducted with 5 Black men in clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized to analyze the interview responses. The results suggest that a community of support helps to foster awareness which in turn lead to the students engaging in meaningful action. This interplay of factors has contributed to the resilience of these students psychological functioning in their respective programs. Implications for education and training in counseling psychology are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Black men, Clinical psychology doctoral program, Counseling psychology doctoral program, Critical Race Theory, Phenomenology

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DAVID CARLTON STANLEY JR

BA, Morehouse College, 2010

MEd, University of Georgia, 2015

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DAVID CARLTON STANLEY JR

Major Professor: Edward A. Delgado-Romero  
Committee: Anneliese A. Singh  
Brian A. Glaser

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott  
Interim Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2020

## DEDICATION

For the people that are here now, those that have come before us, and those yet to come. Thank you for taking the time to read what I have dedicated the early years of my life to understanding more about, in an honest effort, challenging you to become the best that you can be as you go forth on this planet doing great things for others. Consider the ways in which you think about people when you are interacting with them. Even if your thoughts do not manifest into words, they will surely manifest into actions. My mother once told me, “If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say nothing at all.”

This is for my family: Lillian Anderson (maternal grandmother), Reggie Smith (maternal grandfather), Carrie Mae Smith (paternal grandmother, deceased), Oscar Stanley (paternal grandfather, deceased), Daphne Farrell (maternal aunt), Gail Anderson (maternal aunt), Michael Anderson (maternal uncle), Dezi Stanley (paternal uncle), Michael Muhammad (paternal uncle), Robert Stanley (paternal uncle), Harun Abdel (paternal uncle), and Jason Stanley (paternal uncle).

This is for my parents: Donna Stanley (mother) and David Stanley Sr. (father)

This is for my siblings: Latoya Smith (maternal sister), D’Andrea Johnson Morris (paternal sister), Deshane’ Stanley (both parents – sister), Jamel Stanley (both parents – brother), Joshua Stanley (paternal brother), Shamar Stanley (paternal brother), Christian Stanley (paternal brother) and the parents, siblings, and children of all those above.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Health and well-being are at the core of the profession of counseling psychology (Delgado-Romero, Lau, & Shullman, 2012). Individuals who identify with a minoritized identity are at a higher risk across their lifetime for developing pathologies related to their mental and physical health (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Black men specifically are more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed, become incarcerated, and to receive higher sentences than their White counterparts. Before we jump to conclusions and paint the picture that all Black men must be bad. Consider the context that is often left out when research studies are developed, conducted, and reported. Did the study discuss the impact of systemic oppression? Was the historical atrocity of the African slave trade and the lingering effects mentioned? Is the existence of racism considered? Despite the current and historical barriers that exist, there are still Black male doctoral students that exist in higher education. Through specifically focusing on Black males in clinical and counseling psychology programs, the aim is to illuminate their often voiceless experience.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Although a large body of research exists explaining how there are few Black men in the helping professions (Beasley, Miller, & Cokley, 2015), there is little information about the sociocultural influences that support the resilience of Black men who are currently in doctoral programs. There has been numerous research studies to show that being exposed to stressful experiences occurring over the life course can substantially impact a person's mental and

physical health, (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996, p. 145). Thompson and Neville (1999) point out that mentally healthy adults understand that they are inseparable from the environments in which they live and influence. This also holds true for counseling psychologists that are embracing one of the basic assumptions and tenets of multicultural counseling and therapy theory known as embeddedness. According to David, Okazaki, and Giroux (2014), “People are embedded in multiple levels of experiences (individual, group, universal) and contexts (individual, family, culture, society).” This simply means that every individual has a very complex set of circumstances that impact their experience and that every individual’s actions can only be understood after the context in which they exist has been accounted for.

In the United States (U.S.) there is a deeply-rooted culture of White Supremacy. Consequently, there is a pervasive and seemingly protected dominant narrative that stigmatizes and negatively portrays select groups of individuals (i.e. Non-white) based on their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities. Negative racial and gender stereotypes (e.g. Black men are aggressive and engage in criminal activity) have the potential to become endorsed and have negative effects for those individuals or those negative stereotypes can serve to act as a motivating factor (i.e. active resistance) for youth (Rogers & Way, 2015). Active resistance would be considered a protective factor that serves Black men who intentionally refrain from perpetuating stereotypes. Racial profiling and negative stereotypes that perpetuate racial profiling increases day-to-day stressors, as well as over the course of a lifetime (Kleider-Offutt, Bond, & Hegerty, 2017). Stress can take on many forms, but nevertheless, in abundance it tends to have negative effects on health both physically and mentally. With research involving individuals identifying as Black frequently focused on disparities (Garibaldi, 2007), many studies fail to address social inequities in detail while attempting to and intending to provide solutions to problems that are systemic in

nature. Exploring cultural factors that serve as protective factors for Black male graduate students in helping professions is the leading motivation for this research. Highlighting salient cultural factors that made attending graduate school feel possible for the participants, aims to enlighten future generations of why these students became inspired to pursue graduate education, with the intention of increasing intrinsic motivation through positive association.

To provide some context, Black people in the United States face vast disparities across vital areas (e.g., high unemployment rates, low socioeconomic status, and high incarceration rates) that directly negatively impact their mental health, physical health, and overall well-being (Carter, 2007; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Levy, Heissel, Richeson, & Adam, 2016; Pieterse & Carter, 2007). Low socioeconomic status is a central component undergirding the seemingly insurmountable amount of disparities. Without a steady stream of income it is more difficult to excel unless you have the support of other people, savings, or another form of money (e.g., credit card, trust fund, inheritance). Although inequities exist, it doesn't change the fact that people require a steady source of income to provide for themselves and their families on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. To remedy this some people engage in criminal activity, but others have jobs, occupations, careers, or are transitioning toward a job, occupation, or career. Graduate students are focused on developing skills towards a career specializing in specific areas, making them highly competitive candidates for higher paying positions. Consequently, graduate students are on a path to positively impacting their socioeconomic status and ability to live without the stressors associated with low-income or poverty.

Despite negative stereotypes, racial profiling, police injustice, and vast disproportion in socioeconomic status and educational attainment rates. Black doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology continue to graduate from rigorous programs and go on to have very

influential careers. There have been studies that discuss an active resistance to stereotypes (e.g., resistance for liberation) (Rogers & Way, 2015) employed by oppressed groups, which is long-term and benefits the self and others by uplifting the collective. It is my belief that in order to counteract the barriers and inequities that plaque Black persons in the U.S. society, there are protective factors that foster such an active resistance for liberation (e.g. racial centrality, school efficacy, (Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2018) and ethnic racial identity (Rivas-Drake, Seaton, Markstrom, Quintana, Syed, Lee, Schwartz, Umaña-Taylor, French, & Yip, 2014). Responding to negative stereotypes in such a positive way is characteristic of a proactive coping response. According to Spencer, Dupree, and Hartmann (1997), “The specific coping processes required for people of color were acknowledged nearly a century ago by DuBois (1903) who suggested that American Blacks necessitated a virtual ‘double consciousness’ or the dual status of being both American and Black.” This requires the Black American to constantly be in consideration of how they are being perceived, requiring energy resulting in race-related stress. Stress requires those who experience it to respond or negotiate the stressful events, however, individuals don’t respond to stressors in the same way. “The experience of stress requires coping which may be of two kinds: reactive coping methods and proactive (psychosocial) coping responses. Reactive coping methods (e.g., withdrawal) and proactive (e.g., resistance for liberation) are linked to a coping outcome or product which may be either productive in quality (e.g., competency or self-efficacy and resiliency) or unproductive (e.g., school-leaving/dropout),” (Spencer et al., 1997).

The current study is addressing a gap in the literature by exploring how proactive coping strategies were developed as well as utilizing a multicultural psychology perspective that aims to address cultural differences within and between cultures of ethnic groups (Hall, Yip, Zárate,

2016) with a focus on exploring how those factors contribute to their resilience. The existing literature focuses on generalizability or group differences (i.e. comparing higher education enrollment rates of Black males to Black females, as well as their white counterparts). This study does not focus on negative stereotypes, but instead highlights cultural assets and protective factors that contribute to resiliency among male doctoral students in the Black community. Utilizing a multicultural psychology perspective was in line with a national initiative –My Brother’s Keeper—for helping Black boys and male youth or, to speak more generally, boys and young men of color, to “stay on track; providing the support they need to think more broadly about their future; building on what works, when it works in those critical life-changing moments,” (Obama, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of specific cultural factors that have helped to foster resiliency for Black male doctoral students despite facing barriers (i.e., systemic oppression, multiple disparities, and perceived discrimination). In contrast to previous literature, this study utilized a strength-based approach to determine how Black male doctoral students experience their doctoral program and how they negotiate the landscape of their program.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The current study utilized critical race theory (CRT), which grew out of Bell (1992) in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. Bell (1992) discussed how the stories of people on the bottom illustrate how race, racism, and other forms of oppression continue to dominate our society (p. 144). He also expressed how they attempt to better understand the real world to better oppose the forces that perpetuate oppression (Bell, 1992, p. 145). The five tenets therein to guide the current study as explained by Howard & Navarro (2016) are as follows:

1. Centrality of race and racism – All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, including intersections with other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and citizenship.
2. Challenging the dominant perspective – CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives and re-center marginalized perspectives.
3. Commitment to social justice – CRT research must always be motivated by a social justice agenda.
4. Valuing experiential knowledge – CRT builds on the oral tradition of many indigenous communities of color around the world. CRT research centers the narratives of people of color when attempting to understand social inequality.
5. Being interdisciplinary – CRT scholars believe that the world is multidimensional, and similarly, research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) within the field of education has since become an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that seeks to disrupt race and racism in educational theory and practice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT also serves as a framework to challenge and dismantle prevailing notions of fairness, meritocracy, colorblindness, neutrality, racism, and educational inequity (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Critical theory focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people's experiences and understandings of the world (Patton, 2002).

Furthermore, the research has been guided by proponents of phenomenology as outlined by Smith (2015). "Experience is a system of interrelated meanings – a Gestalt – that is bound up in a totality termed the 'lifeworld'," (Smith, 2015, p. 12). Therefore, when utilizing the phenomenological approach, the researcher is charged with exploring in-depth the taken-for-granted assumptions by which people navigate their lifeworld (Smith, 2015, p. 13).

Phenomenology is, in addition to being a sub-paradigm of constructivism, a research design frequently used by counseling psychology researchers (Morrow, 2007). Phenomenology is focused on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into

consciousness, both individually and shared meaning (Patton, 2002; 2015). Within phenomenology, what is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world (Patton, 2002; 2015). As a result, the researcher and participant gained clarity around the phenomena of the doctoral experience in clinical and counseling psychology through describing the many details that embody the phenomena, which would be in this case, resilience and the factors that contribute to that resilience for Black men in clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs. Phenomenology is a relevant paradigm for this study because the researcher is concerned with the phenomena of cultural influences and how they are understood and incorporated by the participants.

Often counseling psychology research in multicultural, feminist, and social justice areas is influenced by a critical-ideological paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005b, p. 130). Through the integration of a critical-ideological paradigm and a phenomenological paradigm, the researcher can use the multiple realities of the participants and the researcher to develop an understanding of the cultural assets and protective factors contributing to resiliency, with a unique emphasis on challenging the oppressive structures in place which maintain inequality. It may be useful to see the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur*, who crosses paradigms knowledgeably, carefully, and in response to the nature of the research question and emerging data (Morrow, 2007). Basic to the critical theorist is the belief in a constructed lived experience that is mediated by power relations within social and historical contexts (Ponterotto, 2005a). Proponents of constructivism emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” from the point of view of those who live it day to day (Ponterotto, 2005a). Constructivists study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others (Patton, 2002). However, more so than constructivists, criticalists conceptualize reality and events within power

relations, and they use their research inquiry to help emancipate oppressed groups (Ponterotto, 2005a).

### *Theoretical Framework*

“According to Lewis (1995), emotional and/or cognitive appraisals of the environment influence the moment to moment patterns of self-organization. The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) expands on this self-organization perspective by nesting the self in the larger micro-and macro-systems and illuminating the impact of feedback from the environment, particularly related to individual differences of race, class, skin color, gender, and maturational differences,” (Spencer et al., 1997). As I previously mentioned, such unwelcoming feelings and even blatant discouragement can have a profound impact on one’s self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and overall stress levels in general. Despite this reality, there are individuals that continue to thrive in higher education and it is my aim to highlight and share the strategies they utilized to navigate a system or world in which they may be normatively expected to experience racial prejudice (Brittian, 2012). “The integration of a phenomenological approach with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Spencer et al., 1997) affords a method for capturing the individual’s ability to understand societal expectations, stereotypes, and biases—even those that they themselves endorse or fulfill,” (p. 818).

Consequently, this study aims to provide knowledge of cultural assets, protective factors, and other contributing factors of resiliency within the Black community, specifically for Black men in clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs.

### **Definitions**

*Black* has been defined by the participants as their racial identity and the meaning or impact it has for them.

*Black identity* is defined as “a consciousness of self within a particular group” (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017)

*Culturally Committed* is defined as a commitment to one’s cultural group (i.e. racial and ethnic).

*Cultural Influence* has been defined as the influence of attitudes, beliefs, norms, roles, and self-definitions shared and practiced by particular ethnic groups (Betancourt & López, 1993).

*Personal Resilience* is defined as “the individual’s effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one’s life history, which enhances one’s adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies” (Franklin, 1999)

**Research Question:**

1. What are the protective factors that Black male doctoral students experience as they persist and complete their degrees in psychology?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of the current study is to intentionally highlight the cultural factors that contribute to the resilience of Black male doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology programs. However, this resiliency cannot be adequately captured without recognizing the impact of the environment or context.

Parents have a pivotal role in the development of their children's values and expectations as it pertains to school from an early age. It has been found to be influential for students, especially when young, to have their parents involved in their life with school-related and non-school-related activities (Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011). This helps students to establish a trusting foundation with their parent, increasing the chances that the student would seek their support when dealing with difficulties both in school and outside of school. As it relates to school, it is important that parents are involved, so the parents are able to advocate on behalf of their child as it pertains to their quality of education. Furthermore, parents must be encouraging of their children in both academic and non-academic settings. This encouragement can help with building self-esteem and leading to a strong self-efficacy for children as they continue to develop into adults.

#### **Barriers**

##### *Historical*

According to Educational Laws of Virginia in 1854, Margaret C. Douglass, a southern White woman was imprisoned for one month in the common jail of Norfolk, under the Laws of

Virginia for the crime of teaching free colored children to read. *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, held that separate but equal facilities did not violate the U.S. Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. Homer A. Plessy was of one-eighth Black blood. The impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was to relegate Blacks to second-class citizenship (LOC, n.d.). In January 1961, Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes, became the first African Americans to attend the previously segregated University of Georgia.

Currently situated in a sociocultural context 63 years post-*Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, it is important to understand that education was central and valued in the Black community before 1954. The displacement of Black teachers, principals, and superintendents as a result of *Brown v. Board* created a strong mistrust of the educational system within the Black community. Meanwhile, the Tuskegee experiments (1932-1972) were in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of a 20 year longitudinal study in which the purpose was to understand the effects of untreated syphilis in Black people. These instances helped to create and establish a healthy cultural mistrust for European Americans.

Black male teachers are few and far between in the U.S. (Bryan & Williams, 2017). For students, it can be important to have at least one teacher that looks like them with a genuine interest in helping them succeed. Tillman (2004) explains that, "The race and background of their teachers tell [students] something about authority and power in contemporary America...These messages influence children's attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. The views they form in school about justice and fairness all influence their future citizenship," (p. 390). Even at the high school level it is clear that minority students across America face harsher discipline, have

less access to rigorous high school curricula, and are more often taught by lower-paid and less experienced teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

### *Higher Education*

In 2000, only 25.1% of Black males between the ages of 18-24 years old were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017a) in 2015, 34.1% of Black males between the ages of 18-24 years old were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. As it pertains to doctoral degrees conferred to Black male graduate students, in the academic year 2000-2001, there were 2,655 graduates which accounted for only 4.8% of the total number of doctoral degrees awarded that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). In the 2015-2016 academic year, there was a significant increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded to Black men (4,558 graduates), but that still only accounted for 6.4% of the doctoral degrees awarded that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). The number of doctoral degrees conferred for Black men in psychology during the 2015-2016 academic year are even fewer (121 graduates), which accounts for a sobering 0.07% of all doctoral degrees awarded that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017c). “If our nation’s current demographic and educational attainment trends, exacerbated by these trends for minority males, continue, the general educational levels of Americans will decline, and the United States will be unable to attain our shared goals of leading the world with the highest proportion of students obtaining postsecondary degrees who are prepared to be engaged citizens and productive members of our nation’s workforce,” (College Board, 2011, p. 2). This highlights how important it is to increase the recruitment and retention of Black males in degree-granting postsecondary institutions.

The greatest divide in resources (as well as racial, ethnic, and class diversity) is between the most selective institutions and the open-access, two- and four-year schools,” (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013, p. 24). This lack of access and resources clearly demonstrates how the educational achievement gap continues to be widened and controlled by the political structure. “Across all racial/ethnic groups, gender gaps in enrollment are widest among Black students, with Black women outnumbering their male counterparts by 27.2 percentage points,” (Harper, 2006, p. vii). “The challenge of responding is most acute for the most disadvantaged men of color. At just about every stage of the educational pipeline, they lag behind minority women in terms of achievement, persistence, and school and college completion,” (College Board, 2010, p. 18).

#### *Outside of Educational setting*

“Black youth [age 16-24] not enrolled in school had an unemployment rate of 29.2 percent in October 2012, higher than the rates for their White (14.1 percent), Asian (13.9 percent), and Hispanic (17.8 percent) counterparts,” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013, p. 2). “Ways in which Black and Latino male teens, especially those who reside in America’s largest cities, are persistently portrayed in media and elsewhere negatively affect society’s expectations of them and, at times, their expectations of themselves. Visions of them in urban high schools are almost universally negative – they are expected to be the perpetrators of school violence and at the bottom of every statistical metric of educational excellence. Viewing these young men through deficit-colored lenses sustains a depressing, one-sided narrative about their social and educational outlook,” (Harper, 2014, p. 1).

### **Resilience (Cultural Factors)**

#### *Educational Resiliency*

“Educational resiliency refers to the ability of students to succeed academically, despite difficult and challenging life circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding,” (Kim & Hargrove, 2013, p. 300). Moreover Cohen & Sherman (2005) mentioned, “When the perceived relevance and salience of negative stereotypes are reduced, African American students have been found to perform significantly better in school, sometimes dramatically.”

According to Kim & Hargrove (2013), “At predominantly White institutions, the following factors have been identified to help foster resilience with Black male college students: ‘Prove-them-wrong coping mechanism,’ (p. 302). This proactive coping strategy is synonymous with excelling and providing counternarratives to counteract the negative stereotypes associated with Black people and Black men in particular. Other factors included having, high self-efficacy and same-race peer encouragement (p. 302), as well as developing supportive relationships, whether family or friends (p. 303), and spirituality (p. 302). Many of the participants intentionally accessed healthy peer relationship through membership in fraternities, campus clubs, and by attending orientation programs (p. 302).

### *Racial Identity Development*

Franklin (1999) describes the five ego statuses in racial identity development:

1. *Preencounter* is the first ego status, when the salience of race is low, little awareness exists of social and racial concerns, or one’s own group is devalued.
2. *Encounter* is the ego status brought about by some “eye opening” incident such as a microaggression in which there is confusion, disillusionment, and a loss of clarity in perspective.
3. *Immersion-emersion* is seen as a transitional ego status in which race becomes highly salient. This can be seen, for example, in Afrocentrism. There is idealization, a new basis for values, commitment, loyalty, and a metamorphosis driven by one’s racial group as the standard. Both Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) note that this process brings a particular anxiety and hypervigilance around race matters. At a later point in this ego status, theoretically, the individual, gaining clarity and a new perspective, lessens his or her

embrace of all that is Black and opens his or her worldview to a broader and gradually more racially inclusive one.

4. *Internalization* is the ego status level in which there is more balanced perspective and acceptance of one's own racial group as well as objective assessment of other racial groups. There is a greater level of inner self-confidence and flexibility in thinking.
5. *Internalization-commitment* is an ego status reflecting an integration of values that allows for life-long commitment that embraces awareness and pride in one's own group worth as well as the virtues intrinsic to other racial groups. This status is endowed with genuine biculturalism and a humanistic worldview.

“The establishment of a positive identity for the African American male student is significant in that it serves as the foundation upon which the student can develop some sense of agency and in turn determine where he ‘fits’ within the academy,” (Bonner & Bailey, 2006, p. 28). Brittian (2012) also mentions that positive attitudes about one's racial group are associated with better psychological functioning.

Although there are studies that examine factors that have contributed to the resilience of Black men in higher education, there is a paucity of research focused on Black male doctoral students, particularly as it relates to psychology. This study aims to address this gap in the literature.

### **Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods**

The fundamental purpose, or goal, of qualitative inquiry is often described as understanding lived experience within its sociohistorical context (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Psychology generally, and counseling psychology specifically, has been dominated by positivist research paradigms and associated quantitative methods, which has limited the profession's ability to advance the field in significant ways (Ponterotto, 2005a; Hall, Yip, Zárate, 2016). “Counseling psychology has, among the disciplines of psychology, led the way in qualitative inquiry in dissertation research, program curriculum, and overall acceptance of qualitative methods, although this shift has been and still is quite limited in scope,” (Morrow, 2007, p. 209).

Qualitative methods are particularly suited to counseling psychology for a number of reasons, including the growing interest of students in conducting research that is congruent with paradigms and methods that are more closely related to practice, the relevance of qualitative approaches to multicultural counseling and psychology, and the advantages of methodological diversification and expansion to psychology (Ponterotto, 2005a, p. 100). “Interviewing is one of the most important qualitative data-collection strategies and is a key source of data for biographies, phenomenological studies, grounded-theory studies, ethnographic studies, and case studies,” (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007, p. 308). As mentioned the researcher is focused on the experience of each individual and how they make meaning of their experience individually and collectively. “Using language as a tool, the researcher is able to plumb the depths of this experience to glean meanings that are not otherwise observable and that cannot be gathered using survey or other data-gathering strategies,” (Morrow, 2007, p. 211). According to Morrow (2007), “Qualitative methods can be used to explore variables that are not easily identifiable or that have not yet been identified, as well as investigating topics for which there is little or no previous research and addressing contradictions in the literature that arise from prematurely, inaccurately, or inadequately operationalized variables (p. 211).”

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### **Research Design**

##### *Type of Qualitative Design*

A phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is they experience what they experience (Patton, 2015). Phenomenologists describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (e.g., grief, anger, discrimination; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). Utilizing a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to capture and describe the perception of the participants and how that perception serves as an influence to their resiliency in higher education.

##### *Site Characteristics*

The researcher conducted the current study via Skype, in order to be exhaustive in the recruitment of Black male doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology program.

##### *Access*

“Gaining entry and developing a successful research process depends on the quality of rapport between research and study participants,” (Suzuki et al. 2007). To help rapport building skills, the researcher conducted a pilot study that involved 3 individuals from a southeastern university. Three major themes emerged from the pilot study. The emerging themes were receiving support from family and the community regarding education for Black males, the desire to give back and impact others in a positive way, and the belief that racism is still alive.

The researcher gained access to the interviewees for the current study through the Multicultural Services and Programs office at the southeastern university, as well as doctoral groups via social media (i.e., Facebook). The researcher emailed the administrative assistant in the Multicultural Services and Programs office, in order to gain access to potential interviewees. The researcher has frequented this office and has built a relationship with the administrative assistant over time. The email included a description of the study and the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for participating in this study included identifying as a Black male, cis-gender or transgender (i.e. African American, African, Caribbean, and all other African descent [or if someone may perceive you as Black]), and being enrolled as a doctoral student in clinical or counseling psychology. The inquiry of the current study began with a focus to better understand the factors that contribute to the resilience among Black male doctoral students that remain persistent, who are simultaneously navigating the unwelcoming social climate that influences every aspect of the many cultures within the United States. The importance of focusing on resilience as it pertains to helping professionals is strongly positively correlated to mental health and well-being, which is one of the guiding principles of counseling psychology (David, Okazaki, & Giroux, 2014).

Rapport is essential to gain and sustain entry and connotes the quality of the relationship between researcher and participant (Suzuki et al., 2007). The researcher for the current study served an active role on and off campus and was involved in social justice and advocacy work, which is congruent with the values of helping professionals as well as the offices within Multicultural Services and Programs. “Rapport is facilitated when researchers and informants share common goals—this is when participants understand the study’s purpose and agree to help

in the research process and when the investigator learns about and accepts the goals of the community,” (Suzuki et al., 2007).

### *Data Management*

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman, 1993). For reliability to be calculated it is imperative on the investigator to document his or her procedure and to demonstrate that categories have been used consistently (Silverman, 1993). Silverman (1993) indicated four strategies that will be useful for the researcher to promote reliability which include making short notes at the time of the interview, expanded notes made as soon as possible after each interview, a fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each state of fieldwork, and a provisional running record or analysis and interpretation. The researcher utilized the strategies to promote reliability outlined by Silverman (1993) during the pilot study conducted during Fall 2016 and the current study conducted in Fall 2018.

### **Methodology**

A literature review revealed that most counseling qualitative psychological studies are both audiotaped and transcribed (Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). Suzuki et al. (2007) has outlined steps that researchers should follow in collecting interview data for qualitative research, which include selecting the interview type, formulating the interview questions, conducting the interview, recording the interview, transcribing the interview, and debriefing the interviewees. Most qualitative research interviews in counseling psychology employ semi-structured rather than highly structured protocols (e.g., Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005; Downie & Robbins, 1998; Fuertes, Mueller, Chauhan, Walker, & Ladany, 2002; Kretchmar, Worsham, & Swenson, 2005; Sivis, McCrae, & Demir, 2005; Yeh et al., 2005). For this study, a

semi-structured interview was utilized to ensure that the participants were asked the same questions, but also to allow flexibility on the part of the researcher to probe further when necessary. “The semi-structured interview is designed to cover a common set of themes but allows for changes in the sequencing of questions and the forms of questions, enabling the interviewer to follow up on the interviewees’ answers,” (Suzuki et al., 2007, p. 311).

The interview method that was utilized to conduct this research was a phenomenological interview (Seidman, 2013). This interview method was adapted to capture the essence of the three separate interviews (i.e., Focused life history, Details of experience, Reflection on the meaning; Seidman, 2013, p. 20-23) at one point in time. The research questions that the researcher answered using this interviewing approach were, “What is it like to be a Black man in your doctoral psychology program?”, “What things or people have you encountered that have been helpful/not helpful?”, and “What does it mean to be a Black man in this profession?”

According to Suzuki et al. (2007) phenomenological studies involve in-depth interviews lasting as long as 2 hours with approximately 3 to 10 participants. The researcher collected data at one point in time for each participant (Patton, 2015, p. 255). Although the researcher collected data at one point in time, the researcher focused on depth of responses rather than about breadth of information gathered (Patton, 2015).

## **Analysis**

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data,” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study focused on providing a rich description of the data set rather than simply a detailed account of one particular aspect. The identified themes that have been coded and analyzed are an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). The themes have been identified using an inductive approach, in

that the themes are strongly linked to the data themselves. “Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions,” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). The level at which themes were identified was at the semantic level. “Within a semantic approach, the themes are identified within the explicit surface meanings of the data,” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). As it pertains to epistemology, thematic analysis was conducted within a constructionist framework, “which does not seek to focus on motivation or individual psychologies, but instead seeks to theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided,” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). Braun & Clarke (2006) described six phases of conducting a methodologically sound thematic analysis. Although there are steps that are useful guides to conducting a thematic analysis, “analysis is not a linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more recursive process, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases,” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

*Phase 1* required the researcher to become familiar with the data through transcribing, reading, and re-reading the transcripts. The researcher developed a dissertation analysis team (DAT) to help with the reading of the cleaned transcripts. The DAT team consisted of 14 undergraduate students in the psychology department at the University of Georgia, who were recruited through the psychology department. There were 5 groups of 3 coders each who were assigned one transcript to review and code. Before the initial reading of the transcript, the principal researcher held a meeting to discuss the Braun & Clarke (2006) article to ensure that the analysis team was aware of the entire process before we began. The researcher transcribed all interviews to maintain confidentiality for the participants. The researcher also coded all transcripts in order to develop a consensus among DAT team.

*Phase 2* consisted of generating initial codes within the data. The coded data differ from the units of analysis (themes), which are (often) broader (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Coding was performed manually by writing the codes on the cleaned transcripts using the *Review tab* and *Comments* section on Microsoft Word. The principal researcher and the DAT team met to determine how to generate initial codes using the first transcript. An example of initial codes are located below:

Table 1: Initial Coding Examples

<b>Data extract</b>	<b>Coded for</b>
My parents like having to choose which school and stuff I need to go to because they wouldn't just let me go to like our neighborhood public school.	FamSupportEd
I actually met a guy who did it in Ann Arbor, um Michigan. And he's a basically, he's the clinical psychologist but he travels to the different schools to actually like meet with kids.	Model; ModelCareer

The researcher and DAT team were able to establish consensus on individual codes. There was not perfect attendance at every DAT meeting, but we proceeded with students who were present during meetings and incorporated the coded transcripts of students where not physically in attendance.

*Phase 3* involved searching for themes. At this stage, all the interviews have been transcribed and coded, essentially manifesting as the finalized code book. This phase is when the researcher begins to analyze the codes and consider how different codes combine to form an overarching theme (p. 89). The researcher utilized a mind-map to separate the code book into categories. A collection of candidate themes and sub-themes were ascertained.

*Phase 4* involved reviewing themes. This phase involved two levels – Level 1 includes reviewing at the level of the coded extracts. This means checking to ensure that the coded

extracts themselves form a coherent pattern within the candidate themes and sub-themes (p. 91). Level 2 involves “considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether the candidate thematic map ‘accurately’ reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole,” (p. 91). The DAT team met to determine if the coded extracts formed a coherent pattern within the candidate themes and across the data set.

Table 2: Candidate Themes and Sub-Themes

<b>Candidate Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>
Family	Good (Immediate and Extended); Bad (Immediate)
Values	Accountability; Responsibility
Support	Good (Education, Peers, Adults, Community); Bad (Lack)
Education & Program	Good (Important, Research Interests, Career Interests, Professor, Advisor); Bad (Barriers, Self, In-class)
Experiences	Good (Self); Bad (Community, Education, Self)
Barriers	Self; Education; Financial (Give Back); Worry; Seeking Mental Health (Stigma, Diagnosis, Provider, Lack Awareness, Cultural Mistrust)
Awareness	Good (Education, Self, Context); Bad (Education, Self, Context, Profession)
Action	Coping; Avoid

*Phase 5* involved defining and naming themes. Each theme was defined in detail and consideration was given as to how the themes fit together and in relation to each other across the data set as it pertains to the research question (p. 92). The named themes and their definitions are in the results section of this report in Figure 1. *Phase 6* involved the production of the report.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) attempts to make meaningful contributions to the field for practitioners, theorists, and policy makers (Howard & Navarro, 2016). The philosophical assumptions of phenomenology rest on studying people’s experiences as they are lived every day, viewing these experiences as conscious, and arriving at a description of the essence of these

experiences, not explanations or analyses (Creswell et al., 2007). Phenomenology is not only a description but also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). The reader of this report should come away with the feeling that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Creswell et al., 2007, pg. 255). Researchers and evaluators analyzing qualitative data strive to understand a person, organization, community, phenomenon, or program as a whole (Patton, 2015, p. 67). Therefore, the researcher will provide a description and interpretation of the participant’s social environment for an overall understanding of what has been said during the interview (Patton, 2015, p. 67), with the intention of addressing and eradicating the persistent and deleterious educational inequity in the Black community (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

#### *Assessing Data Quality*

According to Morrow (2005) a range of criteria have been suggested to provide trustworthiness in constructivist research. Patton (2002), “Integrated constructivism and social constructionism, identifying standards of quality and credibility as acknowledging—and even embracing—subjectivity.” Patton (2002) also identified dependability and member-checking as important components of quality. The researcher utilized the process of reflexivity to understand how my own experiences and understandings of the world affect the research process (Morrow, 2005), which included making my implicit assumptions and biases overt to myself and others (Morrow, 2005). Also, “Understanding participant constructions of meaning depends on a number of factors, including context, culture, and rapport,” (Morrow, 2005). Moreover, the researcher assessed the consequential validity of the research, which assess whether the research achieves its goals of social and political change (Patton, 2002) through member checking. As it pertains to trustworthiness, the researcher utilized memos, reflected on my own experience

through a subjectivity statement, and engaged in triangulation of analysis with DAT team and participants through member checking.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

There are several areas of personal interest for wanting to better understand the sociocultural factor that help to foster resilience for Black male doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology programs, how these students managed to persist despite negative forces, as well as the unique strengths that emerge for Black men that are committed to uplifting Black culture. The most personal for me is how the intersection of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and the sociocultural environment of the U.S. has impacted my journey. From growing up around people that did not believe I could make it or be productive (i.e., teachers and other adults), made me want to better myself. There was this *active resistance* around wanting to prove those individuals' wrong and negative stereotypes invalid. However, as I began to take school very seriously, I noticed that not all of my friends were taking school seriously. As I progressed to college, I saw differences in the way people perceived their situation in college compared to where I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida. I noticed in Atlanta, Georgia, while in college, people were generally more open-minded and encouraging. While in Jacksonville, Florida, people held more of a negative outlook in terms of the accessibility of opportunities for advancement in life. I think that this had much to do with people accommodating or endorsing cultural stereotypes (Rogers & Way, 2016), internalizing negative messages that eventually had a negative impact on their self-efficacy (Ellis et al., 2018), which ultimately kept them from pursuing education and seriously considering the opportunities that come along with higher education.

I was raised in Jacksonville, Florida from the age of 6. I grew up in a single-parent home with 3 siblings and my mother. I would consider us to have been part of the lower-working class.

At the age of 16, I began working in order to lighten the financial strain on my mother. I wanted to make it as easy on her as possible, because I knew that she was the sole provider for our family. I believe that this inspired me to work harder and to not give up when things became overwhelming. I believe that many children from marginalized populations and identities have a similar ideology. The “push through it” mentality was a coping mechanism for myself and others that I knew growing up. In terms of my development, I will say that having healthy role models was very important. For example, the unique opportunity of being able to benefit from having a big brother figure through the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America program at the age of 11. I met with my “big brother” once per week. We would go on outings to different places and it really opened my eyes to different things that were going on in the world while offering me a different perspective from a responsible Black man with a job, a wife, and a child. This experience helped me to see, that the “good life” was at least a possibility, although I was Black and that is not what I was accustomed to regularly seeing.

I would not be in college if it were not for my friends around my neighborhood which helped to support each other as well as to hold each other accountable. Another important factor in my development was learning from the good decisions, as well as the mistakes of others. For example, I understood the reality of poverty at a young age. I realized that children are a large expense, therefore I realized that I didn’t want to have children while I was not in an adequate position to provide for them financially. However, my older sister had her first son when she was 19 years old in 2003. This was similar to when my mother first had my older sister, my mother’s first child, my mother was 17 years old in 1984. I began to see the pattern, with poverty and stress being the next step. As a result of witnessing this I became intentional about not having children, focusing more on what will keep me from experiencing poverty in the future.

Another personal interest in this research has to do with my strong ties to social justice. I believe that everyone should be treated equally, simply for being a human. So when I see discriminatory acts, gestures, or ideologies, I have an immediate reaction to do all I can in order to eradicate it and to alleviate people from being negatively impacted by injustices. I have personally had negative experiences with police that force me to be aware of the negative impact of social injustice. For example, I remember being a passenger in a car that was pulled over at night in Sandy Springs, GA in 2009. I believe we were stopped for not using the signal light when switching to the next lane. There was one officer that approached the driver side of the vehicle. After about 3-5 minutes, another officer arrived on the scene and proceeded to approach the passenger side of the vehicle with his flashlight out and gun drawn. I did something that my mother always warned me not to do, which was turn around and look at the officer. The officer then shouted, "Turn your ass around boy!" I immediately turned around and proceeded to become very nervous. I was unsure of what was about to happen, but one thing is for sure, I did not want to die because of a traffic stop that went wrong. I remember telling this story to some of my classmates during my master's program and they asked, "Why didn't you get his badge number?" At the time, I couldn't even think about my rights, his badge number, or anything else. I was simply trying to remain alive and not become a victim in the ongoing headlines of police brutality. Getting his badge number was a privilege that I did not have.

As a result of my experiences, I have compassion for individuals on the receiving end of discriminatory acts. Given the fact that there are minorities attending institutions of higher education, but few are Black men, I am interested in better understanding the factors that contribute to the resilience of Black male doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology. I understand that the researcher's passion can be a double edged sword. For the pilot

study that was conducted before the current study, identifying as a Black male appeared to be beneficial because I have my own experience to draw from, also making it easy for participants to relate to. Consequently, I didn't want the interviewees to assume that I understood absolutely everything they referenced. Also, I didn't want to inappropriately generalize my experience to the interviewees. When the interviewees responded in a way that aligned with my experiences, I refrained from expressing that such was the case, because I didn't want to influence their story or the subsequent material that they decided to share moving forward. Also, I didn't want over identification to be the cause of not probing for more elaborate details regarding their experience. More importantly, I didn't want to miss potentially valuable information because I assumed our positions were the same. Additionally, in keeping with the proponents of phenomenology, I strived to be open-minded, not relying on my own experiences to serve as the basis for comparison or evaluation of the interviewee's responses.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized to actively delineate themes and categories from the interviews that participants agreed to and formally consented to partake in. The inductive approach to coding was used to ensure that the participants' voice was truly captured and able to be represented, without being influenced from constraints from previous literature. Themes were identified at the semantic level, involving, "a progression from *description*, where the data have simply been organized to show patterns in semantic content, and summarized, to *interpretation*, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications," (Braun & Clarke, 2006; p. 84). There were three major areas identified that served to help each one of the participants understand, navigate, and grow through their experience both personally and professionally.

#### *Participants*

There were a total of 5 participants that participated in the current study (see Table 1 – Participant Demographics). The participants' ages ranged from 23-37 years old. There was one student in a Clinical Psychology doctoral program at a research I institution in the north (2<sup>nd</sup> year) and four students in Counseling Psychology doctoral programs at research I institutions in the north, northeast, and in the south (one 1<sup>st</sup> year, two 4<sup>th</sup> year students, and one 6<sup>th</sup> year). Four of the participants attended graduated from an HBCU (Kay, David, Keith, John). The other participant graduated from Historically White Institutions (Barry). Kay has a Black male as his chair and described having a positive relationship with him. David did not mention the race or

gender of his chair. Keith has a White male chair, who he also described as having a good relationship with. Barry currently has a Black woman chair, only because his first advisor died from a heart attack after Barry's first semester enrolled in the program. He described having an extremely unsupportive experience with faculty and students after his advisor's death, but feels that his current advisor is much more supportive now. John has a Black woman chair, who he seems to greatly appreciate.

Hall, Yip, and Zarate (2016) describe the importance and relevance of research aimed at understanding the ethnocultural diversity among homogenous groups of individuals with marginalized identities. There is so much diversity within the sample of participants with regards to their age, upbringing (i.e., households), their work experience, and family dynamics.

*Kay* grew up as an only child with both of his parents in the household. They also both have master's degrees.

*David* grew up as the baby of three children in a household with parents who have been married for fifty years now. However, he and his siblings were raised by his grandmother and mother. David has an older sister and an older brother.

*Keith* grew up as an only child raised by a single-mother, although his father did continue to contribute financially. Keith's mother fostered three sets of children from foster care, eventually adopting the last set she fostered, beginning when Keith was fifteen years old.

*Barry* grew up with both of his parents who have been married for thirty-one years since he was five, along with his younger brother who has his bachelor's degree.

*John* grew up with his mother and step-father, after his mother and father divorced when he was one-year old. He has four older sisters, but indicated feeling as if he grew up as an only child because his youngest sister is ten years older than him. John is a first generation immigrant,

whose mother is from Aruba and father is from Trinidad. John’s father passed away at the age of fifteen. John also explained that he didn’t have the greatest relationship with his father at that time, “which added an interesting dynamic.” (John – Line 237)

Table 3 – Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Program & Year	Attended/Graduated from HBCU?
Kay	23	Male	Black	2nd year - Clinical Psychology	Graduated
David*	Asked not to report his age	Male	Black	4th year - Counseling Psychology; On Internship	Graduated
Keith	30	Male	Black	4th year - Counseling Psychology	Graduated
Barry	37	Male	Black	6th year - Counseling Psychology	No
John*	25	Male	Black	1st year - Counseling Psychology	Graduated

Note: (\*) = Completed Member Checks

After refining the themes, three major protective factors and available supports emerged (Community of Support, Awareness, and Action) both within and outside of their programs (See Figure 1). It is important that these protective factors exist because the students had to deal with systemic racism in addition to the normal stress of graduate school that all students face.

Protective factors and available supports are essential to counteracting the impact and effects of risk factors and available challenges (Hope & Spencer, 2017).

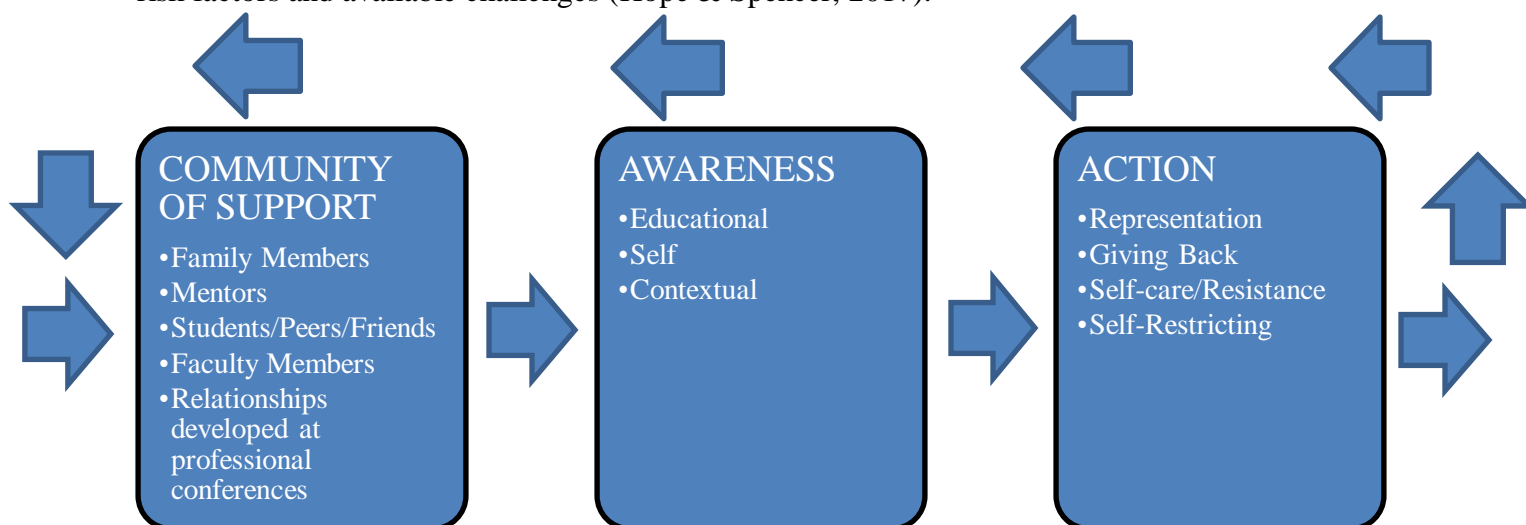


Figure 1 – Relationship between the Protective Factors

*Relationship between the three major protective factors and supports*

The protective factors and supports identified seem to be required in order to withstand the onslaught of perceived challenges both outside (macro-level) and within their program (micro-level). As this study is employing a strength-based approach, barriers will be mentioned as needed but not focused on. Having a community of support is useful for multiple purposes, including supporting and challenging an individual to be the best version of themselves. This community is constructed of immediate and extended family members, which may also include friends. The community is an integral component in instilling values that help to guide the students long after they have become adults and branch out from their tight knit family community into the larger community. The individuals that have been the most helpful within their community of support, have displayed helpful characteristics worth mentioning that include being open, available, straight-forward, and genuine. More importantly, as a result of the support and the high expectations from within the community, the students have developed an increased awareness. Awareness in this context describes an experience or set of experiences that provide a perspective that otherwise might not be known. The participants demonstrated heightened awareness in three areas (i.e., education, self, and contextual). As the students' awareness expanded, they became more intentional in their actions. Their actions have been influenced by the values learned and established within their community of support and have been categorized into four areas (i.e., representation, giving back, self-care/resistance, and self-restricting). This action on behalf of the students leads them to establish a role in serving as a part of someone else's community of support.

...you know, how the NAACP has like the state of Black America, like um research pamphlets that they send out. I don't know if they, if you heard of that.

**I: Yea. I've heard of it.**

R: Okay. So, um, they had like Tavis Smiley doing a panel and on the panel was, um, Thomas Parham...Na'im Akbar...and then there was some other people, but so like that was the first time I ever saw PhD psychologists talk about social issues that affect people. And I was just like, wow, people study Black people. (Barry – 732-758)

Barry explained that in his psychology program, he was learning about people and concepts that were not particularly interesting or relevant to his understanding of himself as a future psychologist. However, once he saw prominent Black men discuss social issues that affect Black people, his awareness was expanded, his self-efficacy was bolstered, and his positive self-concept was increased. Psychology, when presented in relevant racial/cultural context, began to capture his interest and gain relevance at that moment. Kay also expressed this frustration with psychology lacking racial/cultural relevance:

...our lessons and basically how we go about actually learning psychology, isn't nearly as diverse as it was when I was in undergrad at an HBCU. (Kay – 560-561).

### **Community of Support**

The first and most important protective factor is the community of support within and outside of the students' respective programs. This community is comprised of many different individuals including family members, mentors, students/peers/friends, faculty members, and relationships that have been developed at professional conferences. The following quote illustrates the importance of family and the sense of belonging that is created when the influence of family is present and supportive.

I learned there what the meaning of family was. And um, I think for me, um that was the most important thing that I got from being in [REDACTED]. A sense of family. A sense of belonging, um, that I think really solidified who I became as a person. Um, and just values and I think morals I have now. Um, and [REDACTED] is sort of like a small kind of town, small downtown and um some families believe, specifically my family believes that it sometimes takes a village to raise a child. (David – 150-155)

### Family

Family is one aspect within the protective factor of community of support. Family is representative of a strong bond within and between a group of individuals that make up immediate family members, extended family members, as well as friends that are deemed to be as close as family. The characteristics that represent family in the current study include caring for individuals who are considered as family, being supportive, straight-forward in communication, advocating at various levels, while having distinct and close relationships. The family provides some of the earliest experiences that we can recall in life. Therefore, the family is exceptionally influential in the development of the individual's worldview. Family members have had a major impact on instilling values that continue to guide the students, as well as being there to provide support to the students. The family can serve as a protective factor by being a place of support or serve as a risk factor contributing to feelings of being detached. Values determine what the family deems as important and becomes the standard to which individual family members are measured. The family is a bidirectional support system which requires support from the individual members as well as serving as a support for the individual members, which are in place to help counteract the barriers existing within the larger context. The following quote illustrates how important it is for parents to not only talk about valuing education, but to demonstrate their value of education through their involvement in their children's learning.

...good thing my parents were active in terms of like educating me and how to read, write, different things because I'm guessing it's the same, but like racism's, the same like down south as it up here, it's just that it's more covert...but they tried to put me in developmental special education classes...without even testing me...and that was from kindergarten all the way up until when we finally decide to leave. And so my parents were like, how are you going to like put him in those classes, when you haven't even tested him, you haven't done this and that. And then he like even during one of the conferences, gave me a book and had me read it to the teachers. (Barry – 214-232)

This could have turned out much worse if his father was not acting as an advocate on his son's behalf. Unfortunately, instances like this happen more often than we would like. Knowing that, Black people have developed suspicion toward White people in traditional helping fields (i.e., education, medicine, government, and police), known as cultural mistrust or healthy paranoia (Whaley, 2001). "Situations leading to increased self-consciousness, involving interactions between individuals of unequal social status and where there is a risk of harm to the disadvantaged person psychologically, physically, or socially, may engender paranoid responses" (Whaley, 2001, p. 557). When incidents of racial injustice are highlighted through formal networks (e.g., news coverage) and informal networks (e.g., social media) cultural mistrust and healthy paranoia is heightened. Barry described how his father was involved and realized that he needed to intervene when Barry's teachers were attempting to put him in remedial classes alongside children who were not able to read. It was clear that Barry did not need to be in class with children that could not read, as his father allowed him to demonstrate his reading capability during one parent-teacher conference. Also pertaining to cultural mistrust, David shared how the police were threatening his parents when they came to their home searching for a family member that was not there. David did not experience this firsthand, but has received account of the encounter from his parents and his sister who was a young child at the time. Incidents such as these maintain adaptive mistrusting attitudes.

In terms of awareness, the family has also been instrumental in developing the students' awareness, especially with regard to the value of education. As a result of having such an intimate relationship between the students and their family, the students feel compelled to be engaged (action) in meaningful ways. The instilled values enlightened and influenced the students' awareness, consequently leading to action. Awareness is a direct consequence of the

influence and impact of the community of support. Awareness is also gained through experience. Furthermore, a heightened awareness includes an understanding of current and historical cultural norms and events that impact their experience.

The immediate family is composed of parents, grandparents and siblings. These family members seemed to have had a significant influence on the development of the students. Although different in dynamics for some students, each student was able to grow up and benefit from having a secure attachment to their parents, which helped develop a sense of belonging or a secure sense of self. David describes having his grandmother, who has been extremely influential in caring for him while his mother and father were working and sacrificing, to help provide him and his siblings with a better opportunity. However, his mother was still very much involved and demonstrated her value of education, because she paid for him and his sister to go to private school for middle and high school. David's grandmother helping out in this way, was not only required so that his mother could maintain her job, but relieving her of parenting duties immediately after school helped to reduce additional stress on his mother.

So I did not really grow up in the home of my mother and father. I grew up in the home of my grandmother. I saw my mom everyday though. Every day she would come over in the morning and get me and my siblings ready for school. And you know [she] came to every school event. All those type of things. (David – 288-292)

The family has been instrumental in individuals aiding one another, especially when the children are younger and require more adult supervision that the parents simply do not have the luxury to provide. Experiences like this reinforce the need for community, increasing the appreciation for the support of the community. Keith did not grow up with any siblings or close family members until he was 15. Whenever family fails to provide a safe haven, then individuals are forced to compensate and find meaningful connections elsewhere.

So um both [of] my parents are still living in [REDACTED], however, my mom is not originally from there. So, uh and that's who's family I've been exposed to the most...and so, I didn't have much family in the area. Or I didn't know much family in the area most of my life so, I grew up and created really strong friendships um that were more like family um or like brothers to me. And so we we uh we kicked it man. (Keith – 109-117)

The students' familial networks provided support and validation during their childhood and adolescence to help prepare them for their journey toward the doctorate. Families have transmitted clear expectations about obtaining their degree. Families employed strategies to facilitate insight and self-awareness within the children. John's mother utilized her influence to create a positive experience for her son, implanting the expectation of high achievement.

I know it definitely meant a lot to her [mother]. Growing up she was always telling me that you're going to be a doctor, lawyer, or a pastor, right? Like those are three options. And I made it to doctor, you know, in some shape or form...I definitely know my family is proud of me...I think that's kind of the philosophy I guess that I've gotten from my family. And like just work hard and like whatever, you know, in whatever you're focus on your career path may be. Just do it to the best of your ability... they are huge supporters. They're at every graduation. You know, they don't miss a beat for sure. (John – 1012-1027)

Along with high expectations, John's mother always encouraged him, and this is important because that encouragement served to provide a sense of security and at the same time helped to bolster his self-efficacy to withstand, combat, and counter the negative messages that he has been destined to encounter at the micro- and macro-level (i.e., racism, negative media images).

...so definitely school my undergrad experience at a HBCU. Um, and definitely my mom. Um, I think one important thing that parents should do is always like positively encourage your kids. Like she would always have all of my trophies and every single accomplishment, up on the wall. So every day I wake up, I see all this stuff, right? So it's kind of a reminder that, hey, I've done something good before so I can do something good today again. (John – 667-672)

The familial role extends further than simply creating a welcoming environment and establishing a foundation for a secure attachment, having an expectation of excellence, and providing encouragement. To be most effective, the family members must understand their

influence as models in the lives of the children and others among them. This is exactly what occurred for one student when his mother decided to take in foster children, as she exemplified the essence of giving back, as she was herself a beneficiary of being adopted as a child:

...and so it's funny like I said, life is circular man, everything kind of comes full circle. And so this idea of her paying it forward, as she was taken in by another family and raised by another family, her doing that and her committing her life to that...and me being able to witness that and I guess I'm doing that in my own way now...that was something that I've literally never connected those dots, so I appreciate you. (Keith – 1674-1685)

### *Extended Family*

Extended family consists of individual family members outside of parents, grandparents, and siblings. Barry shared how the exposure to his extended family members helped to enlighten him about different aspects of the Black culture. This is also a testament to the diversity within the Black experience, from the way that people dress, to the way they talk, as well as how they choose to interact with each other. Throughout the interview, Barry mentioned how he was raised in an environment that has been heavily populated by White people, which provides a different cultural experience from growing up in an area heavily populated with Black people.

The students also mentioned other Black people, including students and faculty, as taking a familial role with regard to the close tight knit relationships between them.

I probably would say it's kind of isolating a little bit, because there are what, there are two Black women in my program. And my professor is the only Black male in the department. And then, there is one other Black female professor. And I have a pretty good relationship with her. She is also from Detroit. Um so, like I have a very small community. And I feel like because it's so small it kind of forces us to almost be kind of like a family. (Kay – 340-344)

Within the Black community, there is an emphasis on mutual dependence and support, collectivism and struggling together. This value is expressed in the Afrocentric value of *ubuntu*, often translated as “I am because we are”. According to Washington (2010), “The greatest value

of the human being is contained within the collective aspect of our existence,” (p. 33). Thus, students socialized in African American culture would seek out other African American people in PWI’s and expect to form close-knit friendships that are supportive and mutually affirming. “Previous research on African-Americans born in the U.S. affirms their espousal of collectivistic values emphasizing family closeness, community bonding and solidarity but they also espouse some individualistic values, particularly pertinent to the “horizontal” values of autonomy,” (Smith, Witherspoon, Bhargava, & Bermudez, 2019, p. 1239).

However, family is not always as supportive in the ways that are most beneficial for the family or the students. At times those individuals who the students consider to be family may feel as if the students have become too distanced, finding it hard to relate to the students, leading to problematic and stressful interactions.

And so for my family, it is a lot of emotion. It is, “I’m proud of you, but I’m also maybe envious of you. I am glad that you made it, but I also feel like you’re not gonna be as, you’re not, now you’re further away from me. (David – 1306-1308)

At times physical distance is enough to weaken relationships between family members and the students as they have taken time away from family to complete their degrees. This strain can be more pronounced at the doctoral level because students have 4-6 years of schooling prior to the start of their doctoral program, where the student was removed from the family. Over time, this can become a hindrance in maintaining healthy familial bonds.

Um, for certain people in my family, I’m gonna also say that it’s tension because certain people feel like, “Oh, you’re not relatable anymore because you now have a doctorate and you are better than [us] in some ways. I am not able really to go back to school, I have to work every day, I have kids, I have all these things, but look at you. (David – 1299-1302)

Without knowing it, family members can begin to force striving students to question whether the pros outweigh the cons of pursuing their degree. When moments such as this occur, the students’

family shifts from being helpful to serving as a catalyst for doubt and insecurity, leading to students distancing themselves even further.

My cousins I feel like feel like I'm this this foreign person. They don't know who I am...but then my older relatives that are there parents...the ones that do have bachelor's degrees are proud of me because they know. They have bachelor's degrees, so they were able to get to that and that was a struggle for them. But then they were like you went like three times more than us...I think people are proud of me...but at the same time I think there's like jealousy, there's like other feelings that individuals have that cause a level of isolation for me and some of my lower educated cousins. (Barry – 1835-1846; 1854-1858)

Therefore, the reality of family is that levels of actual support can be mixed, especially family members who have less formal education or a limited understanding of higher education. Many family members are supportive, but the students reported navigating jealousy, intimidation, resentment, and a perception that they assumed they were superior to others by virtue of pursuing the doctoral degree. Thus it became problematic when the family, which is a significant source of support, became a source of stress. However, on balance, the participants in this study reported getting more support than not from their families.

### *Values*

Within the family there are a set of unwritten rules known as values that govern the family's decision making, activities, and actions. Family values are the set of principles that guide a person during their life and as they create families of their own. The family values apparent in the current study include caring about education, caring about others, something that is passed down through family, something that is shared within the community, as well as a responsibility to give back to the communities they belong to. When values have been instilled through immediate and extended family, then internalized by the individual, those values inform that person's worldview, experiences, and consequently their actions. Family plays a major role in the development and maintenance of values, especially as it pertains to being Black in the U.S.

Therefore, a person who has a strong communal perspective has usually been supported in some capacity and wants to support others in return. The values of accountability and responsibility have been carried from the family with the students into their pursuit of education and their career. John clearly believes that his culture has a major impact on his motivation for pursuing his degree:

I definitely don't take it for granted. And I think that was definitely influenced by my culture. Um, (pause) yeah, I think that's probably one of the largest influences of it...because like I'm here for a purpose. (John – Line 317)

John's mother initially immigrated to this country with very little material items. John was also raised in a single-parent home. John explained that American teenagers don't value education because they don't always realize the importance of education and the investment it takes. John also attributed his purpose to the sacrifices that others have made on his behalf, so that he could have the opportunities that are available to him, specifically his mother and the sacrifice that she made as an immigrant to this country and the difficulty that ensued as a result of starting over with limited resources. These experiences helped to shape his perspective of wanting to set and achieve goals that involve giving back to others. All the students in the current study described similar sentiments of having a sense of responsibility to give back in a meaningful way.

### *Accountability*

The students expressed how being Black and male impacted their desire to hold themselves accountable for their behavior and achievements. This sense of accountability was grounded in family expectations along with the positive and negative expectations of others. In higher education generally, and in psychology specifically, Black men may experience a sense of invisibility or hyper-visibility when in the classroom, clinically, or when conducting research. Franklin (1999) defines, "*Invisibility* as an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents,

abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism,” (p. 761). John explains,

I’m kind of reminded of it every day. I mean, I don't know if that's unavoidable, regardless of whatever space you're in. I think the only time it was unavoidable was in undergrad because they're all Black men. And it definitely informs like how I carry myself. Just in terms of like um respectability politics and like, oh, I gotta make sure I don't mess up because I'm the only Black man in here and if I do something wrong, it's going to be, you know, like, it's all bad for me. (John – 580-585)

Representing ones’ race is an impossible task and a burden that White students do not often have to face as a result of holding White privilege. Internalized pressure to represent ones’ race in a positive way lest you enact stereotypes (Steele, 1997, p. 614) can be exhausting and can lead to things such as the impostor phenomenon (Stone, Saucer, Bailey, Garba, Hurst, Jackson, Krueger, & Cokley, 2018). The pressure that Black students feel to ensure that they are contributing in meaningful ways and demonstrating excellence is demanding. Many times family members are unaware of these stressors that their students are facing while pursuing their degrees. The need for support increases when the pressure increases. More often than not, family members step up to the challenge by supporting their students during these tumultuous times.

...I think that's kind of like, uh the philosophy I guess that I've gotten from my family, and like just work hard and like whatever, you know, in whatever you're focus on your career path may be. Just do it to the best of your ability...and they are huge supporters. They’re at every graduation. You know, they don't mix a, they don't miss a beat for sure. (John – 1020-1027)

As support increased, the students realized that it’s even more of a reason to be the best at their craft, because of the potential to be able to use their expertise to provide services to the communities they are interested in working with. Furthermore, as a beneficiary of support it inspires the students to consider who they are completing this degree for.

...it motivates you to like, you know, to want to do more and like, you know, your success is our success, right? In a lot in a lot of ways when you think of like this communal type of mindset. (John – 1061-1063)

Four out of five of the students that participated in this study were currently enrolled in counseling psychology programs. In the field of counseling psychology, there has been a focus on multicultural psychology. David, Okazaki, and Giroux (2014) embrace the guiding principles of community psychology which involve, “Studying and understanding people within their environmental contexts, appreciating diversity, understanding that knowledge is value-based and influenced, embracing social change, and focusing on the strengths,” (p. 96).

...those things are valued in counseling psych as well, and there's this accompanying value of uh social justice and the work that we do and how we advocate for clients. So when I learned that, in comparison to clinical psych, that really just took me to the counseling route. (Keith – 652-655)

With values of the profession that align with values similar to that of the students, it is justifiable and understandable that counseling psychology would be a good fit in terms of a profession that will support these students' endeavors to engage in research topics that are focused on Black concerns, utilizing diverse methods to investigate their research questions (i.e., qualitative research methodologies).

### *Responsibility*

These students actively choose to hold themselves accountable because of the belief that they have a responsibility to be visible and give back to others in a way that is similar to how they have experienced the generosity of others. However, due to heightened levels of cultural mistrust that exists within the Black communities they wish to serve, it will be important for these students to be visible in their communities to build rapport and establish effective relationships.

I see it as a responsibility and a duty (inaudible), you know, being a marginalized person in the position, you know, with the I guess power that I have. Like, Uncle Ben told us best. With great power comes great responsibility. So like now I'm in this position, like it's my job, it's my responsibility to help somebody else, right? To either pull somebody

up with me or you know, help somebody get up on their own two feet. And I take that responsibility serious. (John – 986-990)

Although this responsibility is self-imposed by the students, it is embraced as a result of their value system.

Not every student has always been aware of the values that have significantly impacted their experiences. While David's parents encouraged him and pushed him in school, David admitted that he was not fully aware of the importance of obtaining a quality education during his childhood. Barry mentioned how he became enlightened around the values that he embraced at both the conscious and subconscious levels, which have been heavily influenced by the U.S.

Barry noticed this after going abroad to Africa:

...being an American because I always am like I'm a Black American, but that it seems like a lot of things when you view media and you view TV or anything like that, it's always like White people this and that. Except like, you know, different Black movies that that might be popularized where you see like the pictures of yourself. And it wasn't until when I went to Ghana that I was just like a lot of these different American values have sunk into me. Even though I try to, like, I think of myself as, as a, as, as not an American. (Barry – 664-670)

This signifies that Barry is cognizant of how the influences of American culture have impacted and shaped his worldview. Barry gained his insight into how he also operates from a very American perspective. Going abroad to Africa helped to provide Barry with a perspective that challenged worldviews that have been engrained as a result of having only lived in the United States.

### Mentors

Support from mentors has been instrumental in the progress and success for each of the participants. Fortunately, the students have been able to experience support within and outside of their respective programs. Mentors in this section are referring to non-faculty mentors. Although many of the characteristics of supportive faculty and supportive mentors are similar in nature. As

mentioned above, mentors are usually trusted by their mentee, meeting the characteristics of someone who would be considered as close as extended family. In addition, mentors that the students identified as being helpful and influential were also Black. These mentors demonstrated interest in the well-being of these students or put simply “genuine caring”, which created the infrastructure to build an effective relationship. Mentors were able to demonstrate their genuine care in different ways. Kay explains,

Even just having like a Black person in my high school that would tell me like, oh nah you should apply to [REDACTED], because somebody with very similar grades that you had, got a full-ride the year before. (Kay – 881-883)

This information was not something Kay was aware of before this Black person at his high school suggested that he seriously consider it further. As a result, Kay applied and received funding to attend the school that his mentor suggested. This is an example of how mentorship can help to combat barriers to higher education, regarding access and paying for it. This also signifies the influence that mentors have in their ability to be taken serious when they make suggestions.

Barry indicated that having a Black clinical supervisor who served as a career role model was instrumental in developing his perspective on what a social worker does and how that knowledge can be utilized within the field of psychology more specifically.

And I had an African American supervisor who was a seasoned social worker that was an administrator at a small college. So like that was the first time for me seeing like where social work psychology could like lead you. Um, so that was like a good experience. (Barry – 843-846)

One aspect of a mentor’s duty is to impart their wisdom and share their experience to aid their mentees in navigating expected and unexpected challenges that arise. Another aspect of healthy mentorship is the ability to lead by example. Barry sought out mentorship from Black elders in the profession at a professional research conference, and they provided suggestions as to the

areas he should consider investing his time as a professional. They harped on values around giving back, which have been values imparted to him through his family and reinforced through Barry's interaction with Black professionals, signifying the importance, urgency, and necessity of him as a Black man to give back to those in his identified communities.

And so I had like a brief lunch with them and I was just like picking their brain about their tracks in terms of why they want to like go into mental health because a lot of times, you know, Black people think we don't need mental health or we usually go to pray the problem away or go to church. And so I was just like...talking to them about stuff and so they were just like telling me about like their experiences and how we do need it, but we also need practitioners of color, especially [to] go back to these communities. (Barry – 861-871)

John experienced academic mentorship as a student through his participation in an undergraduate program designed to help minorities obtain their doctorate degrees. Through this program John was provided with research opportunities early on in his collegiate career. It seems that this opportunity to engage in research, receive support from his undergraduate institution, and go through the McNair program with other students that look like him may have also helped build his desire to pursue the doctorate degree.

...I was also in what's called the McNair program...and it's, [ I ] believe through the uh the Trio under the Trio umbrella, right? But it's about making, you know, helping minorities reach their PhD. So I got involved with that program and then I got all the research and I'm like, wow, I could actually do this. I can actually see myself doing this is, and this is I kind of enjoy this. I get a little bit of nerd, you know, out of me or whatever. (John – 1229-1236)

It is not the case that each student always had mentors actively in their lives. Barry indicates how he grew up in the exact opposite way, by not having mentors throughout his undergraduate education or while he pursued his master's degree.

...I navigated my master's program and undergrad without really any mentors until like the end, like my master's program. I didn't have people that were helping me until the end. In my undergrad, I didn't have people. I found like a couple of professors towards my, my senior year when I was there, even though I was interested in like potentially going to graduate school. And so like I've, I know how to navigate like White educational

environments without mentors, but I was expecting when I came here that I would get that. And that's like one of the things that like has not been helpful for me is being here and not having mentors, not have people that have my back. Not having people that are like (pause) that I'm bringing concrete evidence of racial discrimination, but they didn't, they feel like um they can't challenge it. (Barry – 1623-1636)

This quote suggests that although it can be helpful to have mentors, it is not required to reach the doctoral level. In order to provide some context, Barry grew up in an area heavily populated by White people, limiting his ability to have meaningful contact with Black people who could have served as mentors for him during his childhood and adolescent development. Although Barry did mention having a Black mentor later in his educational experiences at both the undergraduate level and at the master's level, he was able to successfully navigate higher education without much guidance from mentors. Lastly, Barry's desire to attend his current institution where he is completing his degree, was predicated on being able to receive high quality mentorship that he anticipated would be there. Unfortunately, his advisor passed away after Barry's first doctoral semester. Once this occurred, Barry's experience in his doctoral program shifted from being supportive to being extremely unsupportive even though there were other Black professors within the program (i.e., strained relationship with his advisor, issues with funding as he matriculated). The circumstances along with the non-support that he received caused Barry to become upset and even to question his decision of whether he should stay at his current institution.

### *Students/Peers/Friends*

Black students in their doctoral program have an indispensable role in the students' community of support. These Black students are the individuals that the students who participated in this study can most closely relate to. Many psychology programs follow a cohort model, which the students begin and go through a predetermined set of classes at the same time,

usually lasting at least the entirety of the first year. The interactions of the students can either be productive within a cooperative environment, or more reserved in a hostile or unwelcoming environment. Kay explains how Black and Latino students more advanced in their matriculation, decided to come together to discuss program dynamics in an uncensored way. This was an informal setting with no professors present. These students took it upon themselves to reach back to incoming students and share knowledge to help ease the transitional process to the doctoral program.

Before this school year started some of the, kind of coincidentally by like who we're friends with but, the people in the program who are older than me, who are all racial minorities got together and like kind of like told me almost what to prepare for, over drinks. Just kind of like the ways of the department that I should be aware of. (Kay – 507-510)

Without experiences such as this, students would be forced to spend more time assessing and feeling out professors and students in the program, determining who the “safe” people are that they can be open and vulnerable with. All of the participants expressed having Black students in their program, which proved to be a comforting aspect for them. Keith reiterates how older students in his program have reached out to provide information to him as well,

...like I said um having um two Black males who are older in the program than me was extremely helpful and just getting connected um, knowing who to avoid [laughter], knowing which is an undervalued uh piece of advice that you get. Knowing who not to engage with for real. (Keith – 1107-1110)

Every program has dynamics that incoming students will be unaware of. However, it seems that Black students who are further along in their academic journey, consider it important to share this information with incoming Black students. Program dynamics are not the only thing older students can help with. When it comes to more of living in a new city, especially when that city is heavily populated by White people, it can be difficult to find commodities like a good Black

barber, since these things are usually learned about through word-of-mouth (i.e., equivalent to snowball sampling when gathering participants for a research study).

I also think that having the resources and having like I said those two older students the two older Black males in the program...they were also able to um kind of introduce me to different things even outside of the doc program. Um different program initiatives that are going on on-campus. Different groups, and so it was just you know community things...like a barbershop. Something that simple, so it was really stressful when I first moved here. Like where can I go get [laughter], I gotta get my cut, know what I mean?...and I kind of grew this out now, but at the time I was rockin' a low boy, so I needed bi-weekly. I needed something that I could depend on. (Keith – 1133-1152)

Cohort members can help to hold each other accountable as it pertains to getting work done, settings goals, and following through on those goals. David explains how his cohort helped to keep him accountable, simultaneously serving as a mentor during a time that his advisor was not being responsive.

...they made it feel okay to kind of say, “You know what, we’ll get together. We’ll study, we’ll do this, we’ll have a schedule we’ll incorporate clinical work by doing this.” And so they kind of facilitated the needs I think of mentorship. (David – 764-767)

John shares how having Black students in his cohort has impacted his experience and comfort level,

...people um that have been helpful. I could go back to the community thing, like my friend. Definitely, uh, coming into my cohort with another Black person. That was really cool...because now we’re both starting this journey together and we’re like both have a similar racial background. So there’s, you know, room to relate there. (John – 921-928)

Although John is only in his first year of the doctoral program, he is able to feel a sense of comfort by having Black students, who he can relate to within his cohort. As aspiring professionals in the field of psychology it is important to network with other professionals. One of the main opportunities psychologists and future psychologists have to meet each other in large gatherings are at professional conferences. There are different psychological conferences (i.e., locally, regionally, and nationally) that cater to specific populations and concerns within

psychology, where some are more focused on diversity and multicultural psychology than others. For example, Division 17 within the American Psychological Association is named the *Society of Counseling Psychology*. They have a few conferences that they sponsor such as the National Multicultural Conference and Summit, and a national conference dedicated to upholding the values associated within counseling psychology that occurs every five to six years. Professionals and students from all over the country attend conferences such as these. Under the Society of Counseling Psychology, Ethnic Minority Psychological Associations (EMPAs) serve as organizations that focus on specific minority populations. A common emphasis across the EMPAs is the mentorship and development of ethnic minority psychologist and graduate students (Lau, Forrest, & Delgado-Romero, 2012, p. 711). Regional conferences tend to offer a broad scope of programs with a particular emphasis on graduate student involvement and networking with peers, the Society/Division, and its members (Delgado-Romero, Bowman, & Gerstein, 2006, p. 420). This is where many students of color get a chance to meet other students of color, especially when their program lacks diversity. One student was able to capitalize on his opportunity to connect with students from different programs.

...2014 at the Multi- at the division seventeen conference...me and him were like sitting there eating lunch and I basically was like, grabbing all the different minority, the Black people from different programs and I was like, "Yo, we should just basically like get each other's email addresses so we can have a collective." And it was interesting because some of the Black people were looking at me like why should we have a collective, I already have a collective here at my university. And I was like, because the more of us that we have contact with, we can help each other when we get out to the field. And we can help each other with experiences. (Barry – 1509-1520)

Already thinking about what life in the profession is going to look like after graduation, Barry was deliberate and intentional in his attempt to create and foster professional relationships. Within those relationships, Black students often seek refuge to express and discuss racial stressors they have experienced. As a byproduct of being able to relate and feel comfortable,

these strong relationships serve to help when unpacking race-related stressors. At times, this collective approach or discussion can mimic group therapy, especially with these students being in a mental health field. John mentions how he received support from his faculty, but emphasized how the Black students are who he prefers to go to when dealing with racial stressors, more so than the professors in his department.

**I: Um hmm. When you talked about unpacking those racial stressors and stuff like that, um, do you feel like, it's faculty that you're more likely to go to? Or is it peers or like help me understand like that part.**

R: More than likely I'm going to go to peers...um definitely. But there are a handful of faculty members, depending on what the situation is and how related to school it may be that I can go to. (John – 772-788)

Black students at different levels of the program and Black students in other programs have been vital figures in helping to sustain and encourage the students included in this study.

These students also discussed difficulties as a result of being enrolled in their respective programs. Kay expressed how being the only Black male, more specifically the only Black student in his cohort is difficult at times, even though Kay has access to students who identify as a racial minority in the larger program.

So, relatively I think it's tough, but especially when I'm just doing things with my cohort, because I'm literally like the only Black, the only Black person period. (Kay – 349-351)

Kay also credits his treatment and his inability to form more intimate relationships with students in his department on his salient identities as a Black male. Kay perceives the Black women in his program as more capable of developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with other students in his program more so than he can.

It's more that I feel like, I've created a lot because of my, because of me being Black, I think I've created a lot more shallow relationships with everybody in the department. (Kay – 410-412)

Rejection reinforces a belief that cross-racial relations are deceptive and manipulative interpersonal encounters (Franklin, 1997, p. 781). Not only has the inability to create and sustain relationships created an additional stressor for Kay, but coupled with students who unnecessarily exaggerate the stress associated with a particular assignment or milestone that needs to be met, can lead to students withdrawing from engaging with other students in their program to ensure their own peace of mind. For example, comprehensive exams or “comps” were coming up for Keith. Other students in his program who had already taken comps were expressing how difficult their experience was. During this time, Keith was able to seek out support from the two older Black males in his program, subsequently relieving some of the vicarious stress that he was experiencing as a result of listening and being influenced by other students in his program.

Um what hasn't been helpful for me is interacting with a lot of the other grad students, not only my departments' and my program...but grad students in general. Um I think a lot of grad students have this, particularly like at these intense research one institutions...there's a lot of anxiety around a little bit of everything and that's contagious man and I try to stay away from it. (Keith – 1158-1169)

Keith's desire to remove himself from the stress inducing students is a healthy response. It speaks to his resilience, but more importantly his awareness to realize what he needed to help secure his peace of mind as he was already going through a time in the program that is already challenging and demanding. Keith described questioning himself as to whether or not he was working as hard as other students, once he noticed how stressed out other students were compared to how much more calm and collected he was. Unacknowledged cultural coping mechanisms might account for this interaction as White students may feel comfortable and safe expressing high levels of anxiety and stress, while Black male students may not feel safe expressing weakness in front of White students.

### Faculty Members

Faculty members are the last group to complete the community of support in this study. The students discuss the influence and impact of both their graduate level faculty members along with their undergraduate faculty members. Most of the faculty members the students discuss in a positive light are Black faculty members. The faculty often have multiple roles serving as not only professors, but also as advocates for the students within their program, mentors, career role models, and safe havens for students to express concerns (i.e., personal concerns and concerns within the program).

### *Graduate Level*

Faculty members at the graduate level are the student's current professors or advisors. These professors are extremely influential in the professional development of the students as they matriculate through their programs. As I mentioned, most of the professors were Black men and women. John is new to his program, but already feels a strong sense of being welcomed and included.

...I will say one it's my first year, first semester. So I guess in some ways, I'm limited in my insight. But, uh, I love it, because of the community that I have in here. Right? Which is why I chose it, right? So our department chair is a Black man, graduated from Howard. So you have that H-B-C-U connect. My professor, my mentor, my advisor is a Spelman grad, Black woman. And she's killing the game in terms of research wise. There's another, two other Black women that are on staff in my department. So there's one, two, three about four or five faculty members that looked like me. You can't find that anywhere. (John – 498-505)

John intentionally chose his program because of the presence of Black faculty members within his department. For John, representation was completely tied to his decision on attending. Although, he just began, he was able to feel comfortable immediately as a result of having Black faculty and Black students in his program. It is wonderful to have faculty members that identify the same racially, but race is not the only thing that led to John feeling comfortable and able to

appreciate his program. John indicated some of the helpful characteristics of his advisor and department head that helped to foster a welcoming environment.

...in terms of being helpful, um like I said my advisor. I feel like I can, one, the fact that she went to an H-B-C-U...I feel like I can talk to her if I ever needed to about anything and just having that option available. Whether I use it or not, just having that option available has been the main thing. Even the chair of the department, Black man. Like he's very quick to say, hey, if you ever want to talk, I'm here. Right? Like whether I use it or not is one thing, but just to have that option available. I've never had that option period. So like to have it, is just beautiful. (John – 737-746)

More specifically as it relates to John's professors, the characteristics that they display in terms of their relatability, openness, and availability have shown to be helpful for him. This comfort that he has experienced with these faculty have helped John in multiple situations, not just with his interactions and relationships with those faculty members.

...I think that certain spaces, you're more open to feeling like you can speak up. So like if I'm in the middle of a Trump rally, I'm probably not going to, you know, speak up. But like when I'm around people that, you know, will provide that safe space. So like for me, like here it'd be my advisor, some of my classmates, and my cohort members, the older cohort members, the Black people in in the department in the program, but just being in certain spaces, you feel more comfortable to speak up. (John – 676-682)

One characteristic that has also seemed to be helpful for Kay is the directness of his clinical advisor. She is also a Black woman that Kay appreciates, especially for the communication style that she embodies. Although, she is tough on him, it appears to be out of a place of genuine caring. Kay just finished the first year of his program, so developmentally it makes sense that he would appreciate someone who is more direct because of his lack of awareness around program expectations, clinical expectations, and navigating all of these areas as the only Black male in his cohort.

I'd probably say my clinical advisor. She's been really helpful for me because she's, even though she's like not my actual advisor, I don't go to her for the same reasons. She's just really like, straightforward, no bullshit. Just like to the point, real blunt. (Kay – 531-533)

Most professors that students described as helpful and supportive were Black professors, however, that is not the case for every student. Keith mentioned how his advisor, who identifies as a White man, was very supportive for him in multiple ways. Keith discussed how his advisor and he have a similar style that is more lethargic or less structured, which can be problematic at times. However, his professor has been helpful in spaces where Keith, as a student cannot be an advocate for himself.

Although he is a White male, he has been helpful in advocating on my behalf in faculty meetings...obviously there's this power dynamic of me being a student and them being faculty...and so just letting him advocate on my behalf has been extremely helpful.  
(Keith – 1294-1305)

### *Undergraduate Level*

Faculty members at the undergraduate level served as the student's former professors or advisors. These professors were extremely influential because of the early developmental life stage of the students, as they arrived from high school. Again, most of the professors who the students deemed influential for them, identify as Black. One of the overarching characteristics of the professors in this group is their ability to create a belief within the students that enabled them to feel as if they belonged in this field, fostering the self-efficacy of these students who were at the time unaware, yet full of potential and yearning for guidance. Kay illustrates the importance of having Black professors (i.e., representation) when learning, especially at such a critical developmental period in life when the students were very inexperienced and highly impressionable.

I feel like going to [REDACTED] for undergrad and going through that, going through their psych department and like being taught by like Dr. Hicks and being taught by Dr. Barell and some of the people who were like, early Black psychologists. (Kay – 712-714)

Faculty members often times served multiple roles including mentors and career role models.

More importantly, they established relationships with the students on the basis of unconditional

positive regard. Under such circumstances, the faculty members were taken more seriously by the students. Therefore, faculty have an important task of challenging the students to reach their full potential.

My undergrad degree is actually in biology, and I think I chose that because of the mentorship I received during that time. I had a professor during my first year who taught me I think biology 101, and saw a lot of potential in me. (David – 85-91)

Students expressed how their inexperience and inability to lean on members in their immediate family has impacted their desire to have a person genuinely interested in their future, to help them navigate the landscape of higher education. These undergraduate faculty served to facilitate insight and create awareness, providing the student with valuable information that the students were able to use to inform their decisions as they matriculated.

I think the faculty members at [REDACTED] who then took over, cause I don't think I, at that time in my life, fresh out of high school fresh in college, still quite knew how to, say, okay, yea. You know this is the person I want to be. You know, this is what I want to do. (David – 121-124)

One of the most important things to focus on when attending institutions of higher education is fulfilling the requirements for the degree, in order to further advance your career. With a bachelor's degree in psychology, one's potential in the job market to utilize that degree are limited. In order to practice psychology in the United States, you must obtain a doctorate degree. Pursuing the doctorate degree entails obtaining acceptance into graduate school. Many doctoral programs require students to have a Master's before they apply. Undergraduate faculty members have a vital role in challenging students to consider their career options from the moment that they enter the institution.

Um for me getting into psychology to begin with, at the beginning it was more about, "Well, I like to talk to people. I think I'm easy to talk to. I want to help people with their problems." That was the mindset in undergrad. I don't think I really, well no. I know I didn't really know what the hell I was...[laughter] I had to dive. You know?...So I ended up meeting a mentor or my mentor to this day. And he kind of shared with me pretty

early on. He was like uh you want to get a bachelor's in psychology, you gon have to go to grad school. Unless you want to be [laughter], he was pretty raw about it. He said unless you want to be pushing beds in the hospital or unless you want to be direct care staffs somewhere and possibly getting beat up every other week [laughter]. (Keith – 558-574)

Faculty members are helpful and supportive in many ways, however, there are instances in which this is not the case. Some students described how the communication patterns among professors and others students became a frustrating aspect of their experience within their programs. David seemed to have had a challenging time of establishing a trusting relationship with his advisor. The inability of being able to express himself authentically created an internal battle.

So one of the things that I think I needed and I think would be beneficial is having open honest communication and not feeling like what would be said would some type of way, negatively affect relationship and or the progress that I needed. (David – 948-950)

It is important for advisors to create spaces for their advisees to express themselves authentically. The relationship in counseling is essential when it comes to the overall outcomes and progress. The same goes as it pertains to advising, mentoring and training at the doctoral level. Students fare better when advisors model the behavior that is expected of the students. Although some students withdraw as a form of coping, others take the opportunity to express themselves authentically and still find it difficult to effectively communicate, in patterns known to be appropriate and commonplace within the Black culture. Keith states,

...the other piece was and this also ties into um my experience as a Black male... the way that I communicate, or the way that folks communicate with me, this non-direct style of communication that I've experienced over the last couple of years it's been frustrating. But also how I'm received or how I can be perceived when I am communicating directly is also frustrating. (Keith – 1259-1267)

This frustration pertaining to communication style prevented him from pursuing or engaging in interactions with both students and faculty members within his doctoral program that could have

led to established healthy interpersonal relationships. So much of the graduate school journey revolves around having strong supports in place. For one particular student, he had an unfavorable circumstance that led to an ominous experience within his program. His experience was contrary to the other four participants as it pertains to feeling supported as a student. In an instant a promising advisor-advisee relationship was interrupted by an untimely death of his advisor. This advisor was a Black male that recruited Barry to attend his current program. This was a person that Barry trusted would be able to provide him with a fulfilling doctoral experience.

I believe he could have, if he still would have been alive...but then he died and then like, basically I was just left in the program, with limited resources, even though there were other African American professors that were here in the program. And White professors, I'm not going to put the onus on all the Black professors. The White professors were involved with pain and assisting me too. (Barry – 144-151)

After his advisor passed following his first semester, Barry's experience in the program drastically changed for the worse. His new advisor was not as helpful as his previous advisor although, they were both Black professors. This is interesting because it suggests that race alone is not the most salient factor contributing to the relationship between professors and Black students. The characteristics (i.e., relatability and genuine care) are crucial to the foundation of developing a collaborative and fruitful working relationship.

He was a mentor. He worked with students. He cultivated students. He cultivated their ideas. [REDACTED], to me, I don't know how she is with other students. A lot of people avoid [REDACTED], White and Black. But she, like for the longest time, was not really assisting me in any aspect. (Barry – 1143-1146)

Barry's experience of lacking funding and having a difficult time securing funding to continue attending his program, increased his financial stressors. He indicated that White students in his program were getting assistantships and funding in abundance, while he was struggling. Not having the support from his advisor or program, forced him to withdraw from interacting with

students, professors within his program, as well as his major professor and have an experience with his new major professor that is paradoxical from the other students in the current study. In the midst of his frustration within his program, Barry had an opportunity to change schools and get the funding he needed.

...he was just like, Yo, come here. And I was tempted, because I was just like, these mugs are not even like trying to help me out with funding. [REDACTED] was no help, and I don't know why. I don't know if she was just dealing with her own stuff or, or what...but she was not really any help. So I basically stopped talking to my chair for probably two and a half years and just used the student guide book to, to dictate um all of my like moves in terms of the program. (Barry – 1292-1301)

Barry mentioned the pivotal point for him in his program was in the aftermath of his major advisor passing away during the break after his first semester. At the time, his major advisor was the head of the department and an influential figure in his program. This advisor was a social justice champion and a dedicated mentor, who worked with Black students.

...He worked to try to provide funding for all the African American or minority students...but then once he died, shit turned back to like a P-W-I school where it's like hierarchy, we've got to give all the research to the White students and get them out as quickly as possible and keep the Black or minority students here and keep telling them, oh, maybe this might not be the program for you or you guys take longer than others.

**I: Wow.**

R: You're not cut out for it.

**I: Wow.**

R: Stupid shit like that.

**I: Wow.**

R: So that, those things, not having mentors hasn't been helpful. (Barry – 1663-1683)

Involved faculty members in the community of support are critical to helping combat the barriers that students face, especially as it relates to their experiences within the program. Although, Barry displayed resilience in his program by pursuing assistantships outside of his program, he had a terrible incident occur that caused him to question whether he was treated in a certain way based on his race. Barry shares,

I was even offered a position in one department. They offered it to me before they even saw my face. It was based off me just sending a resume and a letter of interest. They offered me. These mugs rescinded the fucking contract when I sat down with them.  
(Barry – 1257-1261)

Barry believes that because he is Black is the reason why the contract was rescinded. Barry came to this conclusion because that was the first time, they met. The interview process was phone only. Instances such as these help solidify a perspective and a belief that the intersection of identities, especially at the intersection of race and gender for Black people, are the most salient when it comes to interacting with other racial groups.

### **Awareness**

Awareness is defined as developing a heightened understanding about a particular area based upon an experience or set of experiences. The community of support for these students has played a critical role in creating insight, which has led to the students developing an increased awareness in the areas of education, self-awareness, and contextual awareness. This increased awareness informed decisions the students subsequently made, or the actions these students chose to engage in. The characteristics that represent awareness in the current study include gaining a better understanding of how to interact with others, developing a better understanding of how others choose to interact across multiple contexts, and the impact of the existing historical context. “Awareness and understanding of structural oppression and its various manifestations can be important factors in shaping adolescents’ social perceptions and civic behaviors during a developmental period marked by increases in social perspective taking, identity exploration, and reasoning about social groups (Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Banales, & Hope, 2017, p. 495).

### *Education*

Educational awareness involved gaining a heightened sense of any aspect of educational related concepts or an increased awareness as a result of information disseminated by an individual in any educational setting. Kay described being grateful for his experience as an undergraduate at an HBCU, learning about psychology through a lens that is culturally relevant and outside of the perspective and scope of psychology-at-large.

And then learning about actual like Black psychology, through going to like ABPsi conference and then things like that and understanding that like, as psychology at-large, they don't (pause). It's not like they don't respect Black psychology, but they do view it essentially as lesser than or some like subset of what actual psychology is. (Kay – 714-718)

Kay's undergraduate experience involved learning about Black psychology, which further stimulated his interest in pursuing a career tailored toward understanding more about Black psychology. According to Franklin (2019), Black psychologists “were pointed to areas where Black psychology should build its own theory, do research based on our own hypotheses about Black life, and build interventions rooted in the strengths and resilience of Black life. As Kay matriculated through his first year in the doctoral program, he noticed something peculiar about the White students in his cohort and program.

This might be kind of unique of the people that make up my program, but they're just, there's some of both like old really liberal White folks...and it's almost kind of like, I think they're constantly concerned about appearing racist and being like social involved and all of those things. (Kay – 382-389)

This tentativeness, withdrawing, or withholding behavior by the White students influences and impacts the learning environment negatively. Clearly Kay noticed that he perceived that their actions were not genuine and inauthentic. Synthesizing this information allowed for Kay to make a decision as to whether or not he would participate fully in being vulnerable when the opportunities were presented. Based on understandings such as these, the students in this study

had to determine the best way to engage with the other students and faculty members within their program. Barry explains,

You can be genuine to a certain extent and still like be an advocate, still get promotions, still get stuff. Or you can be a kiss ass and get run over still. You being a kiss ass or you being like meek or whatever, or being um practicing, um, what is it? (Pause) Um, shit...Or like what Don Lemon talks about, about respectability politics. Like you could do that in certain things and it still won't benefit you. You're still gonna get the shit of racism. (Barry – 2039-2047)

Black people, depending on their level of racial identity and the safety of the environment may choose to “stay in their place,” or refrain from “ruffling feathers,” while others have a more difficult time when it comes to navigating the balance of authenticity and conformity via respectability politics. According to Harris (2014), “The virtues of self-care and self-correction are framed as strategies to lift the Black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy,” (p.33). The argument that Barry makes is that one can engage in virtuous actions, but still be disrespected and not accepted by the dominant culture, which holds access to jobs that minorities need to survive. Belief in respectability politics may be correlated to the encounter racial identity status (Cross, Parham Jr., & Helms, 1991) where one acknowledges that racism exists and one is still trying to avoid the worst consequences of racism through conformity and belief in meritocracy. Barry seems aware of the futility of conformity as he states that “you’re still gonna get the shit of racism” regardless of how you act. Being a Black man at the doctoral level may also have perks. John explains how being one of the Black men, increased his value to the program, in some sense as a token, but that he also had genuine access and his voice was heard. John was intentional in ensuring that he was genuinely wanted and that he would be heard, wherever he ended up for his doctoral studies.

...I love the culture of the program. It's very opening and welcoming, especially being a Black man. I feel like it's often times that everybody wants you in [a] sense, right? To fill their status quo...so, like the hardest part for me, I mean I wouldn't even say the hardest,

but I think one of the most important parts for me and going through like the process and making sure that, not just obviously everybody wants me, to fit that quota. But making sure like I'm genuinely wanted and like, my voice is heard and what not. And I feel like I've found that in my program. (John – 90-99)

Thankfully, John was able to land in a program that was a fit for his needs, including his interests and his desire for Black faculty. This choice has helped to establish a strong community of support for him as he adjusts to the rigors of doctoral education. One of the defining aspects that encouraged John to apply to this particular program and school, was the doctoral program's emphasis on social justice.

...and then I think an important thing when we talk about social justice, just in general, I think maybe this is one of the defining factors. I was born, and social justice just isn't like you go to work and get some social justice and you leave. It is a lifestyle...and day in and day out and how you speak and how you act with people and how you think. Right? And then how you stop and think about your thoughts. (John – 545-553)

John is aware that being social justice oriented is not something that can be learned in a classroom setting. Social justice concepts and acts can be learned about in a class, but John understands that being a social justice warrior is a lifestyle that includes critically challenging one's own thoughts and perspectives on a daily basis.

The students were not always fully aware of everything they needed to know about higher education. For example, Kay was oblivious when it came to being aware of the existence of HBCU's.

I didn't even really know about HBCUs like that. Because pretty much if you went to college in Detroit, if you were from Detroit and you went to college, you went to a school in Michigan because you can't like. It's too expensive to go anywhere out of state. You just kind of rank it based on what, how good you did, whether you can try and get a scholarship to Michigan State or Eastern or Western and, you know, that kind of stuff. (Kay – 873-877)

It was only through his high school mentor that Kay ended up attending and graduating from an HBCU for his undergraduate degree in psychology. His mentor encouraged him to look into an

HBCU, since a peer with similar qualifications received a full-ride the year before. Barry learned of other students' experiences at different programs that he originally considered applying to.

Although he would have been a "token" or the only Black male, he believes that his experience might have been better there as opposed to where he chose.

I specifically picked here and, and um, Howard as like my final two schools, even though there are other schools where I would've been like the only minority student, um, [laughter] and sometimes I look back, I'm like, shit, I should've went to that school. I would have been taken care of as a token and I would've been out because a lot of people that are at these schools are gone. (Barry – 1186-1190)

Barry's major advisor passed away after his first semester in the program. Thus, his experience was tinged by this tragic event and his grief. Thus, it might be natural for Barry to wonder how things might have been different had he not had to deal with the unexpected death of his advisor. He has an awareness of how at other programs he might have been a token, but he would have avoided dealing with the death of his advisor. Barry struggled with his new advisor and eventually forged a supportive working relationship with her. This example illustrates how Barry understands his political capital as a minority man of color in a predominantly White field. He understands that he could choose to be a token and still be successful, yet that is not what he chose.

### *Self*

Self-awareness involved gaining insight into one's needs, abilities, interests, and motivations, as it relates to both within and outside of the program. David explained, that when he first began his undergraduate studies, he didn't have much support as to how to best navigate this new world. At this time, there were major life decisions that required him to try and account for his interests and career goals. However, David was not as aware of what he wanted out of life at that particular time.

I just didn't have that guidance I think I needed as an eighteen-year old, young naïve type of guy that needed just a little bit of direction. (David – 103-105)

Through undergraduate faculty members that realized his potential, David was able to benefit from their guidance during the process of figuring out how to determine his interests and the actions he needed to take in order to realize and fulfill his dreams.

Keith talked about negative experiences while he was growing up,

...so in terms of negative experiences, there weren't many. And I'm trying to think about that, I'm trying to be critical when you ask me this question. Because I realize that well over the past few years, I've realized that I have a really optimistic outlook on life. And so I'm always looking at the silver lining. I'm always looking at the positives... but I mean, growing up we didn't have a whole lot. That's also something that I'm realizing now [laughter]. (Keith – 164-176)

Keith described realizing that he has a very optimistic personality, which is how he continues to view the world. It seems as if this a byproduct of resilience when facing adversity. Keith mentioned how during his early childhood, there were times when he would get home from school and the lights would be off, or the water was off. However, Keith described how his family always made it work and were able to get through it, which is a credit to his ability to not let such difficult circumstances steal his joy. Although Keith has an optimistic personality, that doesn't mean that he couldn't develop a critical consciousness about structural racism and his own internalized racism as this next quote illustrates:

...it's funny that as I was thinking about saving Black folks from this internalized racism or internalized ideas about ourselves. I didn't realize that I was viewing the Black community through an internalized racist ideology, right?...the idea that we need saving is this internalized idea that we're damaged, right?...and which isn't at all true. Um there are some things that, there are some systems that are in place that has historically kept Black communities impoverished and disadvantaged. But that doesn't mean that there's something wrong with Black folks and with the Black community right?...that means there's something wrong with these systems. And so the idea that I needed to change and save Black folks was also this internalized racism that I that I hadn't confronted yet. (Keith – 760-789)

Keith became aware of how his career interests and desires have been influenced from a place of deficit thinking and how that has impacted his own perspectives in retrospect. Keith became aware of his internalized racism, which constitutes this need to help “damaged” Black folks. As a result of this heightened awareness, Keith began to be more critical of the systems that perpetuate oppression (i.e., public schools, government, laws) rather than continuing to subconsciously engage in work with Black people from a “victim blaming” mentality.

Barry gained awareness of how his upbringing has influenced his ability to engage and interact with others in higher education settings.

I'm starting to see now that my experiences growing up in these environments, allowed me to like transition into college and navigate it better than some students who may have grew up in like a majority African American or minority city...so that's like one good thing, but it's still kind of like a conservative White area, [REDACTED] is...so yeah, there's good people uh- and people are always like, yeah, you know, [REDACTED] is nice, but I was just like, not if you're a minority, I would say that. Cause it's like, it's still a lot of like racism. (Barry – 248-262)

Although Barry’s upbringing was in areas heavily populated by White people and he feels comfortable in being able to navigate those environments, he realizes that racism still exists and does not discount the impact it has even on him.

John experienced racism firsthand while he was still in high school, yet he did not let the incident defeat or discourage him, in fact it was quite the opposite:

...I know this one girl I was gonna go to prom with. We weren't even dating or anything like that. We were just friends, a White girl. Uh, she came to me one day in class and said, I can't go. Her dad who was actually a fireman in the town, wouldn't let her go to prom with a Black man.

**I: Wow.**

R: Um (pause) and he's never met me, doesn't know me from Adam. So it was just, you know, little things like that...but I, it didn't break me.

**I: Yea.**

R: I can say that. If anything it made me want to be more successful and get out. It made me work more resilient and I think that just depends on the person. Some people will take negative experiences and really hold on to them and then it might weigh them down. And some people might try and flip it...and I'm more of the latter.

**I: Yea.**

R: And yea, I think that's just my personality. (John – 189-216)

John demonstrates his resilience in remaining optimistic and enthusiastic, even when he was wronged. As John mentioned, he was aware of different ways to cope with racism and the potential consequences of the ways he reacted. Although John described not allowing negative circumstances dictate his behavior and how he feels about himself, there are instances in which external factors have had a significant impact in his development.

...I think some of it is intrins- an internal. Like some of it you gotta motivate yourself, but then, I mean, at the same time, the only way that internal can get reinforced is from the external factors motivating you, right? Be it your mom telling you to do it, whoever it may be. If you have a mentor, your parents, you know, whatever, like that helps you create that internal message. (John – 725-729)

John believes that internal or intrinsic motivation is strengthened from the external motivating factors (i.e., community support system). For example, when his mother continuously encouraged him and kept his awards around so that he could constantly be reminded of his accomplishments. These efforts have been helpful for John and continue to serve as motivation for him in his current pursuit of the doctorate. Furthermore, John described having friends that he knows who are not in school or not capitalizing on their academic potential because of a few differences in their journey compared to his.

...it's just like damn, like we're all excited for just this one. Like what about like back on the block like what are they doing, who's helping them, right? So I think about that a lot of times. Like I think how it was only a small, minute thing that made a difference between me and some of my classmates from high school and from college, right? Like I can go off and name a bunch of people who I think maybe were smarter than me and would've killed the PhD program, but because of finances and this, that, and the third or just working as like, you know, doing whatever trying to get by. (John – 1281-1287)

Having this awareness of other people (i.e., scholars not enrolled in higher education) also serves as motivation for him to do his best and prove himself. John realized that he is occupying a seat in the program, with an opportunity to have a major impact and that this opportunity should not

be squandered. The community of supports served as a very influential component for guiding the students in their decision making as it pertains to school related decisions as well. John indicated that wherever he ended up, racism is still going to exist, so his decision to attend his particular program was based on the protective factors of having Black faculty.

It was like wherever I go there's gonna be racism, right? Wherever I go, I'm going to be one of the few right? Or the only one...so the main thing that I was looking for is to find those protective factors. Right? So the opportunity to build community, like people, not just on my level but above me, and faculty members that will look out for me and have my back...so you know, I tactfully made my choices in in being here because I have those opportunities. (John – 813-825)

Ensuring that Black faculty were in the program provided John with a sense of comfort even though he knew that the program is still going to be rigorous and demanding. In seeking out Black faculty members John was hoping to have mentors who would understand his experience, and allow him to operate in a way that is authentic and unapologetic and still be heard and received in a genuine way.

Given that many psychology programs openly espouse the value of diversity and social justice and are actively recruiting students of color makes it difficult for students to discern which programs they might have the most success in. The question of “fit” often comes into play, that is, how a given program might facilitate or inhibit goals. John explained that his process for deciphering the values of the people in his program (i.e., faculty and students) comes down to intuition and being able to authentically connect with faculty and students.

Um, I think, for me it's more of a feeling than anything. Like there's no concrete way, I think it's more of a feeling and you have to just vibe with people. And really understand, you know, what are people's true intentions. (John – 531-537)

It is important to be able to assess a situation accurately, to determine how to respond or how to act. John indicated that he makes decisions on how he feels about a situation or environment, which is not always valid or reliable. However, it is a way to remain safe in a space whenever he

may not feel welcomed. John has learned to assess the environment and determine both his and the program's comfort level because he understands that in order for him to achieve in the way that he knows how, he is going to need to be and feel supported along the way, which is why being so intentional in considering programs and seeking out protective factors on the front end has appeared to set him up for a supportive experience. John exercised his intentionality in selecting his current program based on the program having an emphasis on social justice, Black faculty, and Black students, in addition to feeling welcomed during the interview process.

### *Context*

Contextual insight involves having an increased awareness and understanding of the field of psychology as well as how the Black lived experience is accounted for or unaccounted for within psychology. Characteristics of contextual insight include awareness of other disciplines and how that may be impacting one's knowledge base and consequently their worldview and decision making processes within the field of psychology. The field of psychology has a history that is fraught with racism, in particular racist beliefs and behaviors against African Americans and also minimizing the success and achievements of psychologists of color (Guthrie, 2004). Guthrie highlights the stories of the pioneering Black psychologists and institutions that are absent from mainstream history of psychology texts. Historically Black people were denied access to attend institutions of higher education in larger numbers until the early 1960s, the results of which meant that the numbers of Black people in psychology were limited and the achievements of Black psychology faculty were often ignored. Black psychology is an evolution of psychology that incorporates and accounts for the experiences and perspectives of individuals who identify as Black. The godfather of Black Psychology, Dr. Joseph White was instrumental in his approach to share this knowledge with the Black community, so he published an article

*Toward a Black Psychology* (White, 1970) in *Ebony Magazine* that laid out a case for a psychology that centered on the experiences of Black people from a strengths perspective. White's bold statement coincided with the civil rights movements and he was one of the founders of the Association of Black Psychologists, a group formed when Black psychologists walked out of a meeting with APA leadership. Keith explains his appreciation for historical context,

I think being able to value and appreciate things outside of our field, particularly and also include historical context to the things that we're studying within the field. I think psychology in general has a tendency to kind of gloss over historical context at times. (Keith – 1602-1604)

Keith has an African American studies background from an HBCU which might contribute to his critical lens and his openness to consider the importance of incorporating other bodies of knowledge. As a Black man in the field of psychology, the students have been persistent in acknowledging how the field has been saturated by White people and how that impacts their own experiences and goals.

I know people are out there doing stuff, but it's the psychology, so saturated by Whiteness, that that we need like advocates at every single level. (Barry – 1900-1901)

Barry mentions that he is aware that in psychology there are more Black scholars in the profession today, but that Black students needed more advocates in education and in society in general.

Once Black men enter the field at the graduate level, there are various obstacles that are awaiting them. One of the most poignant obstacles identified by the participants was being misunderstood as a Black man, often one of very few Black men in their doctoral psychology programs.

Um, there's not a lot of us. And then therefore like it's harder for other people to then relate to, you know, what you can't relate to, right? Talk and then be more empathetic for

that thing that you can't relate to. So be it a field of majority White women. It's probably the farthest thing from being a Black man. So it's like, it might be really hard for the field of psychology to relate to Black men. So like I see my place as, you know, broadening the spectrum of psychology, right? And the diversity of psychology and the empathy that psychology has. Um and not just for Black people, from minorities in general. (John – 978-985)

As a result of not being represented well in general psychology, John described having a passion to push the field forward and broadening the scope of psychology to incorporate the Black experience. Barry takes this thought further by acknowledging that the Black experience is unique and that Black people are the individuals who are most equipped to diagnose and treat Black people, due to the ability to relate to their lived experience, under the shared identity of race.

...they don't know half as much stuff as you do about this, like lived experience and helping people and stuff like that. (Barry – 543-544)

John described how his journey has been fraught with extreme obstacles that extends beyond his immediate experience, beginning with his mother and family immigrating to the U.S. with one suitcase. Having to overcome barriers throughout his childhood with the additional difficulty of being a Black man in a racially oppressive country, has helped John to think of himself in a more positive light. Through John's experiences, he believes that his experiences uniquely qualify him to be in a doctoral program, and he believes that those experiences will help him succeed.

I just kind of, like I said here once before, like y'all haven't worked as hard as I have to get here. Like, y'all don't know what I've been through... just always remembering that it kind of helps eliminate that imposter syndrome. It's like, nah, I know what I did to get here. I know what I had to go through and I guarantee half of y'all didn't do none of that. (John – 692-699)

What John refers to as *none of that* includes the processing that takes place as a Black man in a predominantly White setting. John explained that he was not sure of how other people were

going to respond to his mere presence. For John, this occurred even during his interview process for the doctoral programs he was considering attending.

Like I know for interview process, all but one interview, I was the only Black man in the room. So it's like, it's already kind of awkward, but how much more awkward are you going to make it? Are you going to treat me like I'm the only Black man in the and (inaudible), or he's going to treat me like I'm a human being? Um, yea, I think that was a defining piece for me too. (John – 558-562)

The students experienced the interpersonal interactions during doctoral program interviews as an opportunity for the program to get to know the student and the student to get to know the program. Through interactions both inside and out the interview, the students in the current study could help discern aspects of the environment that were safe and those that were not.

...like racism still exists and nobody's perfect and you still have microaggressions and things like that and sometimes you just don't get along with people, right? Like...that's still exists and I'm living in [REDACTED]. Like I know one time I tried going to a bar and they wouldn't let me because I had distressed denim on. And then five minutes later a White girl walks right behind me with even more distressed denim. I'm like, oh, it's that kind of party! (John – 750-759)

When racist instances like this occur, it helps to have someone in the community of support to share with and discuss the impact it has had on the individual. However, when the environment is conducive to discriminatory acts, it becomes more difficult to receive the proper support.

...so it's nice to have just the, you know, third party, unbiased parties come in and have somebody to reflect your ideas off of...especially when you talk about, you know, being a Black man or you know, whatever minority group you fit into, sometimes you feel like nobody else understands you. (John – 404-411)

Being the target of aversive racism and microaggressions in conjunction with feeling isolated or that others aren't able to relate, can make a difficult situation much more difficult. John explained how being able to utilize therapy or an *unbiased party* would be a helpful resource for everyone.

The experience of direct and aversive racism combined with a history of being pathologized and excluded from mainstream psychology can help create a coping mechanism known as cultural mistrust towards the mental health fields. Keith explained how his family operates in a way that epitomizes cultural mistrust.

...so I think to me it means just breaking stigma within the family. My family is traditionally been, on both sides honestly both my mom and my dad's side, has had this historical kind of mistrust of mental health care...kind of seeing the field of psychology as preserved for people with really dire needs, right?...and I think my involvement in the field has kind of exposed them to the fact that you know, maybe your grandmother, or my mom saying this to me, maybe your grandmother was actually, was depressed or maybe I'm depressed like those things, things like that and coming to talk to me about things that are going on. (Keith – 1447-1462)

As a trusted member within his family, Keith is able to talk with his parents about mental health related concerns providing them with relevant information, in a way in which they are able to receive it. The other consideration is how open his parents are with reaching out to their son and conceding their thoughts in exchange for his professional opinion and ability to provide clarification. Having a suspicion of mental health providers, especially after such egregious acts of injustice have been justified through psychological research and testing, it is not an unhealthy suspicion.

...we have this mistrust within my family and I think within the community. In fact, honestly I think the mistrust is healthy. Uh in some regards...[laughter]...of diagnosis, in particularly when it comes to our kids and how those kids are being labeled, right? (Keith – 1464-1470)

Being privy to the historical context helps to inform future actions. Keith operates with a critical lens, questioning the automaticity associated with training programs and the conformity of professionals that do not utilize their voice to raise awareness of concerns within psychology that persist as issues for the Black race. Barry discusses his awareness of systemic oppression and how being aware is a large part of the battle.

There's a lot of different things and so it's not like one set path in order to combat discrimination and racism and systemic oppression. It's multiple paths...so that's just the thing that I was just like, I want to try to instill that in young people...especially Black males because they just seem to be getting like hit with it. A lot of people from Detroit coming here to school, they go to, even when I was at [REDACTED], they come. They're here for one semester and then they're done. Then they feel like, oh, I can't do college. College isn't for me, but there's a lot of systemic things that are putting them in this predicament where they're not succeeding. And if they're aware of that, they might be able to dodge the punches and survive the fight. (Barry – 2052-2071)

John also described how his ability to determine the dynamics of the space he enters, helps him decide how he will interact. John's practice of surveying the landscape, has been helpful for him in life, but extremely helpful for him as this was all the insight he could gain during the interview process before deciding on a doctoral program.

...so I just try to look for different indicators of that in different people, in having conversations with people, and just whether or not I feel comfortable when I walk into the room. (John – 556-558)

John explains how interpersonal interactions that are perceived as inviting can be the big difference in feeling comfortable or uncomfortable. Interpersonal communication occurs in multiple ways, both verbal and non-verbal. Therefore, the students have multiple opportunities to gauge the climate of the space they are occupying. According to Barry, there are too many Black undergraduate students that attend his current university, who lack the awareness necessary to lead an informed lifestyle. Barry describes how a lack of historical context and appreciation for a community of support can negatively impact a student's experience.

...a lot of them haven't come into contact with White people before. And so a lot of them hold views like, yea, racism exists, but it's a thing of the past, even in this environment of Trump and all this craziness that's going on. Overt racism in Charlottesville, all this stuff. And that it bothers me in terms of their mental health. Because a lot of them are experiencing racism on campus, but then they're just isolated in their own little groups. They don't engage with some of the Black faculty that could help them and they have this air of I can do it, I know what I need to do. Nobody can tell me what to do...And me and the other Black faculty and students know, they don't know what the fuck's going on...but they push help away and then they're quick if at all to go and ask White people for help and White people are shooting them down left and right. (Barry – 2002-2015)

Black students who continue seeking approval of White people who don't express any interest in helping them have a difficult time adjusting to the rigor of higher education because of a lack of support. Over time, these instances begin to erode the desire to engage, creating feelings of isolation and being misunderstood. The community of support is essential to the development of awareness. John equates it to how White people maintain and grow their wealth.

Like, if you look at all these different fortune, I don't [know] like these rich White people families and whatnot. It's because they share their secrets, right? And then they had different assets that they've passed down and they built wealth, right? Like with wealth is more than just the financial part. It's the mentality too, I think. (John – 1381-1385)

Contextual awareness is acquired as you develop and grow personally and professionally. There were also instances in which students identified aspects of psychology that they were unfamiliar with or lacked awareness around. Barry explained how he was unaware that Black mental health professionals were even studying issues related to Black people.

...that was the first time I ever saw PhD psychologists talk about social issues that affect people. And I was just like, wow, people study Black people. Just like up until that point I didn't know that we had any stake in psychology... I was just like, you know, I'm learning all this stuff about all these White people and how like affecting White children and behavioral analysis and all this stuff that wasn't really of interest to me. (Barry – 756-763)

Depending on what is being taught and what is being learned impacts one's interest level, their ability to sustain a high level of attention, and their enthusiasm for learning. Once the topics become relevant and practical for the students, the likelihood of them becoming passionate about them increase. Once a student's passion is awakened, their desire to create changes encourages them to develop an active approach to fulfill those desires.

## **Action**

Action represents the active role these students have taken in their approach to pursuing their career aspirations as well as the responses they have had as products of their environment. As it pertains to this study, action is categorized in four areas including a) representation, b) giving back, c) self-care/resistance, and d) self-restricting. Action requires initiative and follow-through on behalf of the students. Actions are more sustainable when they align with an individual's values, are encouraged by members within their community of support, are deemed important by the individual, are feasible, and are beneficial for the individual and others. The members within the community of support help to create awareness and facilitate insight for individuals, which leads to the student becoming an active participant in bringing about the changes they would like to see.

### *Representation*

By their mere presence in their respective doctoral programs, the students in this study are establishing a standard and expectation for Black men and women all over the world. Furthermore, when these students take a break from school and go back to visit their childhood neighborhoods, their friends and individuals within those communities have something to be proud of, as well as someone to look up to who looks like them and has the lived experience that they are able to relate to.

I just felt like it was important for me to not only represent for Black people and not only provide adequate care for Black people, which I feel like in most cases, they're not able to get. (Kay – 729-730)

Not only is it important for Kay to be able to provide services for Black people in the community, but that he is able to provide them as a Black man. Knowing that providing high quality services is a part of his mission, he can ensure that they are receiving the best practices

related to mental health treatments. Furthermore, Kay understands the importance of being a relatable figure in his community. Even down to interacting with the individuals he grew up around.

Before I get to the point where I'm more well published and all that, um I think it's good representation. It's good for when I go back home. Just to know that I can talk to my neighbors and stuff and the kids that are going to college and them knowing, wow Kay went too. (Kay – 798-801)

When students go on to have professional careers, it tends to have a resounding impact on the community and individuals that they grew up around. This status comes with a great deal of respect and responsibility, to utilize their positioning to serve as an advocate and to bring Black issues and concerns to the forefront. Keith also has embraced this status and has become an advocate within his own family, who have had their doubts about the mental health field.

I think it means having um having uh an advocate um within the family, but also like I said breaking stigma and some of that that cultural mistrust within the family. (Keith – 1482-1483)

Once a trustworthy figure has been established within the community as an advocate, the conversation required to help destigmatize mental health issues and concerns, has a greater chance of being taken seriously. However, just simply being a Black male is not enough. For individuals to be the most effective at creating awareness and developing strategies to assist Black people, it is important to be a figure that is humble enough to engage in grassroots approaches.

I think representation matters, but at the same time when these people are in those positions, doing some type of like outreach, whatever that looks like so that people know that we're out here. (Barry – 2179-2181)

Actively engaging in outreach is an important aspect as it pertains to representation. In the excerpt above, Barry referred to the Black professors in his department and how they are confined to their programs and individual endeavors, not necessarily as involved in the Black

community as they could be. According to Barry, there are Black undergraduate students that currently attend his university, who have never met any of the Black professors from his department. The doctoral students in the current study have been instrumental in their development by seeking out protective factors (i.e., community of support).

It was like wherever I go there's gonna be racism, right? Wherever I go, I'm going to be one of the few right? Or the only one...so the main thing that I was looking for is to find those protective factors. Right? So like the opportunity to build community, like people not just on my level but above me, like faculty members that will look out for me and have my back...so I think I tactfully made my choices in being here because I have those opportunities. (John – 813-825)

When students are aware of their intersecting identities, how those identities may impact their experience, and the protective factors known to be helpful then the students are more motivated to actively seek out those protective factors (i.e., Black professors on faculty and Black students in their prospective program).

### *Giving Back*

As a part of the value system within collectivist cultures, giving back is internalized and becomes more of a responsibility for individuals (Smith, et al., 2019). Giving back can take the form of helping a person or people through monetary means, through one's career and professional activities (i.e., therapy, assessment, consultation, and advocacy), volunteering, and mentoring. Giving back has been reinforced through the community of support that has poured into the lives of these students.

I think it just means responsibility and holding yourself accountable. But it's also like motivational for me. I think because it's easier for me to do something that I believe has greater impact in the long run for other people. (Kay – 974-976)

Kay described with alacrity, a feeling that involves appreciating his positioning in a field that affords him the opportunity to provide services directed at a population he is interested in working with. Kay believes that his dedication to ensuring the best care available continues to

inspire him to help others in his community. David displayed similar sentiments, the notion that Black people are facing barriers and could greatly benefit from the knowledge and services of successful individuals within the Black community who are willing to utilize their skills to oppose injustice, combatting the existing micro- (i.e. access to higher education, unemployment) and macro-level (i.e., government policy, poverty) barriers.

I still feel like there's so many more barriers and things I have to fight for to get for others and to help others. (David – 1411-1412)

Knowledge, awareness, and skills are components of cultural competence (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992, p. 481) that require an understanding of other worldviews, self-awareness (i.e., biases, privileges), and a variety of helping skills. Tailoring these skills to individual's concerns has been established as evidenced-based practice in the field of counseling (Sue & Sue, 2013, p. 351). Keith has utilized these skills in his interpersonal interactions with his family members, allowing him the ability to provide a corrective emotional experience when having discussions. The skills allow Keith to let the feedback he provides emanate from a place of love.

I think this is certainly something that my training has equipped me with skills to do, to be able to engage in these conversations and challenge some of the vulnerability that we don't typically display. As men in general, but certainly the Black man...um so being able to kind of smash all of that and engage in these conversations, but also just show affection and the love to our brothers within these conversations. (Keith – 1557-1565)

Within his program, Keith describes being able to benefit from the presence of Black male students. However, it was more than just their mere presence. These students embraced him and helped to provide awareness about the program dynamics, as well as information about the town in general. As a beneficiary of students giving back to him in that way, it has inspired Keith to embrace that role as he is now the seasoned Black male in the program for the new Black men in his program.

I think that for me like I said the experience can be tokenizing at times. As well as isolating at times. I think if I didn't have, so when I came in there were two other Black males already in the program...both of which just left last year...so now my experience is completely different. So coming in I had them um and I was able to kind of kind of latch on to them right and...learn how to kind of navigate these spaces, the politics of these spaces, as well as just the community of all of this. And so now the experience is different because now I have to be that, I have to be what they were for me, I have to be that. There's one other Black male in the program...I definitely feel a sense of responsibility for every face of color that comes through this program. I have to give, I have to invest something in them just like was invested in me. (Keith – 1033-1051; 1075-1076)

Although Keith feels this pull to give back and pay it forward, as it pertains to the benefits that he has received from other Black students while in his program, he doubts whether White students in his program feel the same responsibility when it comes to other White students as they enter the program.

I'm not sure that other students have this same type of experience or this same type of feeling of responsibility to students of color that come behind them or Black males that come behind them. I'm not sure if other if like my White counterparts have this feeling of, well I gotta lookout for the folks that are coming in. I'm not sure they have that. (Keith – 1067-1071)

Some students feel inspired to give back for other reasons. Barry explains how he doesn't want to perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Black men (i.e., lazy, unprofessional, bad intentions) through his actions. Therefore, he decided to use his gifts constructively in a way that can be beneficial for his community, instead of engaging in activities that only help to destroy his community.

I was just like, you know, I can't just be like, uh, excuse my language, a nigga selling drugs and shit like that to the community. I got to do something else. I got to do something that uplifts our community because a lot of people struggle just to get here. (Barry – 377-379)

Realizing the historical context and the effort that Black people have employed to combat injustices, reiterated the need for young people to get involved and give back to the Black community. During a conference, Barry sought out some established Black professionals in the

field, to seek their knowledge and to learn what he could from them. After this interaction, Barry was able to be fulfilled in his goals and interests as they aligned with what the elders in the field were sharing and emphasizing.

And so I had a brief lunch with them and I was just like picking their brain about like their tracks in terms of why they want to like go into mental health because a lot of times, you know, Black people think we don't need mental health or we usually go to go pray the problem away or go to church. And so I was just like...talking to them about stuff. And so they were just like telling me about their experiences and how we do need it, but we also need practitioners of color, especially [to] go back to these communities. (Barry – 861-871)

Barry has encountered the realities of systemic oppression. That is, the system was designed to disadvantage some groups of people (i.e. people of color), while providing advantages to other groups of people (i.e. White and male), that is not based solely on merit. Knowing that it will not be easy can be detrimental to his desire to continue challenging oppressive systems.

...that's ironic that they're restructuring the city, making the African American side of town smaller to expand the middle of the city where they're like all the events and economic growth was going and they're pushing them over to a highly racist area of the city or outside the city...when I was in my master's program, I was like, you know, I'm gon try to make a change, I'm gon try to see how this education stuff pans out in terms of making change. And then then and I soon found out that it's hard to change systems. (Barry – 819-828)

Knowing that it will not be an easy task can fuel perception of hopelessness, leading one to feel and believe that the system and current way of operating may never change. However, it can also inspire individuals to engage the system at various levels, including policy. Barry's interest in changing systems has also influenced his career trajectory, so that he completed his master's in social work.

So one of my big things I probably should have mentioned is that I'm interested in like policy change. And so I think that's one of the reasons why I went to social work cause I'm more interested in policy more so than solely just doing therapy. (Barry – 1867-1869)

Helping on a macro-level (i.e., policy work) is helpful, but the effects take time to reach the intended communities. The extended time frame for change can also be pernicious. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “Justice too long delayed is justice denied,” (NBC News Archives, 1965). On the other hand, there are ways to contribute at the micro-level (i.e. volunteering) to help assuage the harrowing effects of systemic oppression. Keith’s mother exemplified this contribution to society at the micro-level. She became a foster parent, before she legally adopted her last set of foster children.

...so around the time I turned fifteen or so, she started to take care of foster children. And so they started to come in around that time and I think before I left for college, we had maybe three sets between that, between year fifteen and year, I left around yea I left at eighteen so, between fifteen and eighteen three sets of foster kids that came through. (Keith – 261-265)

This was a key moment in Keith’s life because it helped him to see there was always something he could do to help others. His mother’s demonstration of giving back also helped to build empathy in Keith as he moved forward in his life journey. Parents make big decisions that leave lasting impacts on their children’s lives, from the way they respond to different situations, to deciding where to place their children for school. Barry has been contemplating where to send his daughter to school, while she is still in her formative years.

Wonder like what would be the best environment for my, I have a daughter, but if we have other kids right now we're in a majority African American school district, which has its own issues. And I'm just like, man, you know, is this good for her or should I send her to a all White district to try to find one that's in between. It's like all that type of stuff, cause there’s good aspects of them. And at the same time, the psychological toll of having like systemic racism in your face all the time is a issue. (Barry – 467-480)

Barry grew up in a majority White environment and discussed how much he benefitted from those experiences when he went off to college, being able to effectively navigate predominantly White spaces. However, he explained how there were also racist incidents that he directly experienced as he was growing up. As a result of those experiences, Barry is forced to

contemplate which environment would be best for his daughter, being enmeshed in Black culture or the more resourced education system in the White area.

There have been many instances of the students willingly contributing in ways that involve giving back. However, there have also been instances in which the students either realize that other students don't want to give back or they don't want to give back. For example, Barry describes how he notices others may not be invested in giving back in the same way that he is dedicated to do so.

There's a lot of systemic things that we can do, outside of our jobs to help Black people. And so far it's just like, I don't [know] if there's not that many warriors in the game that are interested in that. (Barry – 1603-1605)

Some students believe that psychologists are in a position to help eradicate the injustices that the field of psychology has perpetuated since its inception, especially as it pertains to psychological testing. David is challenging psychologists to stop conforming and being inactive on such important matters that impact individuals with minoritized identities.

We should be the social advocates and the ones that make the change. But we're also the ones that keep us in this same type of circle, where we're going around saying and doing the same things that history has shown us doesn't work. (David – 630-632)

There are areas that psychologists can be more actively involved as it pertains to disrupting oppressive systems. As it pertains to training programs, students are often required to be vulnerable, authentic, and transparent to help facilitate their growth in cultural competence.

Barry explained how he became fatigued with openly sharing, without it being reciprocated by other students in his program.

I got sick of giving my fucking narrative. I was just like, every fucking class you guys want me to talk about being Black. I was like, these White students should fucking know by now what's going on. They choose not to hang out with me, they choose to not hang out with people of color...cause we go to class, we talk about these different hurtful experiences. We talk about different things and the White people are just silent. (Barry – 1325-1332)

As moments of silence continued to take place during classroom discussions, Barry utilized the only control he had access to at the time, which was his own participation level. Responding by withdrawing was a coping mechanism that was brought up several times. This coping mechanism is effective because it removes the participant from people who are harming him, yet at the same may have long term consequences in terms of networking opportunities that are missed.

Many students have described wanting to go back to and give back to the community they grew up in as a child. John explained having feelings contrary to the other students when it comes to his childhood city and community.

...I've never really been tied to [REDACTED], like I love where I'm from, but I've never felt like I have to you know, go back there once I finish all my schooling and whatnot. Definitely not in my sight. And I think I had, you know, a good community. And would be it friends or like I know one guidance counselor in particular who really looked out for me and really believed in me and a couple of teachers, who really looked out or really believed in me. And I think that definitely made a difference as well...and helping me get to where I am. (John – 142-152)

Feelings of not wanting to go back to one's community is discordant with the trends in the literature and the trends within this study. It is important to recognize and honor the fact that a person's identity does not determine their actions, although it usually informs their behaviors. John indicated that he does not want to return to his hometown, although he had a good childhood experience as it pertains to the community of support (i.e., guidance counselors, teachers, and friends). Within context, John is referring to not going back to his previous situation that involved a life of poverty and struggle.

### *Self-Care/Resistance*

Given the rigor of doctoral training programs, managing the work load (i.e., class readings, assignments, clients, research, conferences, organizational commitments, and outreach)

can become difficult, especially as the work load increases. Students have engaged in various activities that help to reduce the exceeding stress levels. Depending on the situation, students may elect to confront or withdraw as a response. Keith describes his method of responding to other students in his program who operate with a high level of anxiety.

I don't have to make myself sick about this shit...so I just, I stopped [laughter]. And I feel good about it. (Keith – 1250-1255)

There were also instances in which students were intentional in bringing race into the conversation, while in class. Barry expressed feeling frustrated with the dynamics of the classroom, where White students were allowed to participate at a level that seemed minimal to him during these conversations.

...it wasn't like I was like a messed up student. I would say some racially charged remarks because I was sick of all the racism that was going on and nobody checking the white students that were in class. (Barry – 987-989)

After navigating a program with an advisor who passed away after his first semester, Barry experienced multiple difficulties including a strained relationship with his newly appointed chair, difficulties with finding funding to continue his studies, White students barely participating in difficult class discussions, as well as professors that don't effectively manage the dynamics within the classroom setting. As this continued, Barry began to respond by challenging professors.

I would even call out some of the White professors about this, all the White students [they] were guiding along. I told one White professor, I was like, Yo, these White students look up to you. You're fucking holding their hands. They're not gonna move anywhere near where they need to be. And I know it's a process, but I was like they're going to give back. They're going to get their degree, they're gonna get their job and they're going to go back and perpetuate systemic oppression. (Barry – 1371-1377)

Systemic oppression informs discriminatory acts and prejudices at the macro- and micro-levels.

Barry appears to be operating within the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity

development (Cross et al., 1991). Barry's hypervigilance around race matters must be taken into context. Franklin (1999) purports "racial identity development is dynamic; the process engages awareness, sensitivity, and individual responsiveness to racial environments" (p. 780). The professors along with the coinciding circumstances of not feeling supported, heighten Barry's responsiveness.

John's resilience has helped to keep him focused on reaching his goals. Although he has had a few setbacks during his process of applying to doctoral programs. This display of resilience has complimented his desire toward continued progress of reaching his career goals.

...perseverance, I would add in there...because you're not always gonna get told yes your first time. I know it took me three years to get in grad school or to get into a PhD program. So I would add perseverance on there. (John – 1406-1411)

Such resilience is necessary, especially when individuals have marginalized identities and are forced to withstand the difficulties and injustices associated with systemic oppression. It is important for Black men to establish productive responses to such negative conditions.

### *Self-Restricting*

For many of the students, at some point or another in their training program, they have engaged in self-restricting behaviors (i.e., monitoring what they say, monitoring how they convey what they want to say, withholding their authentic emotions, and withdrawing from participating in class). This self-restricting action occurs when students do not feel safe in their environment. At times some students may feel the need to police their own actions and refrain from engaging in ways that are most comfortable for them, to increase the comfort level of others around them. The students in this study are also hyper vigilant about how they are perceived by others, which contributes to their decision-making regarding restricting their actions.

Like there are a lot of things that I do to remain as least threatening as possible. (Kay – 442-443)

Kay describes his physical body and how he attempts to provide a sense of comfort to others within his program, by being extremely mindful of how others may perceive him as he physically navigates the spaces in his department.

...this is more of like a physical thing but, like I go around corners really slowly. I make sure I'm not going to surprise anybody. (Kay – 452-454)

This constant awareness of being perceived as a threat actually impacts how Kay behaves in the university setting. Kay not only actively remains aware of his presence and how that may impact others, but even refrains from sharing thoughts he has. This is a direct response to having professors that are combative and culturally insensitive.

As far as like, watching what I say, I'd probably only say around like few professors. There are some things that they say, where I'm just like (pause), I might have something to respond like keep it to myself. (Kay – 471-473)

For instance, Kay described a professor as always attributing some other factor besides race to many of the concerns of people of color in this country. Although race-related stress is known to increase health-related risks as the frequency and duration of the stressors exist (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Some students believe that they have to monitor their actions when in the presence of White people, however, Barry disagrees to a certain extent.

They're just like, you know what, you gotta navigate around White people a certain way. And I'm just like, mhmm, you do. But then at the same time, you don't have to lose your soul. (Barry – 2029-2031)

It is important to have a supportive environment to discuss what is deemed as significant for the students as they matriculate, learn, and grow as young professionals. As the comfort level rises, it becomes easier to engage in an authentic way. Consequently, the students are not having to

expend energy trying to determine the most “appropriate” way to respond. This becomes the case more when the student begins to share in an emotional way.

...sometime when I get this it's like I do want to say something, but I don't want to be perceived as hostile, right? (Keith – 1295-1296)

Keith explained how there are things he would like to say, but doesn't want to be misperceived, misunderstood, or to be taken out of context. As Keith battles to navigate these dilemmas in his mind, he becomes unable to fully focus on conveying what he wants in a concise and accurate way. When students are forced to continuously engage in self-restricting or self-monitoring behaviors, they can become fatigued and ultimately stop trying. Barry indicated how he became so frustrated with sharing his perspective in class, while White students were seemingly exempt from sharing their perspectives, that he quit speaking altogether.

...probably the middle of my second year, I started protesting in class and I just refused to engage in providing my narrative, it's tiring. And so I just would be like, I would like to hear the White people's experiences, understanding that they're White, understanding that they have privilege and stuff like that. And I would just refuse to talk and that was strategic. (Barry – 1335-1339)

He only engaged students and professors when the dialogue began to get unbearable with cultural insensitivity. The barriers that exist also have a role in perpetuating these behaviors and more importantly the thinking associated with those behaviors. Although Barry believes that students should not have to engage in “respectability politics,” he acknowledges that there are instances that require students to be respectful (i.e., interviews, meetings with faculty, and gatherings with students in the program). Barry previously mentioned his disbelief in the need for Black students to engage in what Don Lemon describes as *respectability politics*. Even when students engage in respectability politics, monitoring their behavior and thoughts, it does not guarantee that they will have the opportunity to navigate the world free of judgement. In order for students to get the most out of their doctoral training experience, they need to have a healthy

community of support that allows them to engage class discussions, develop research agendas, and show up in ways that are most comfortable and appealing to the student.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Connection to previous literature*

Black psychologists have had a major impact in shaping the dialogue around race, ethnicity, and social justice. “Sparked by the emergent movement of Black power and Black nationalism, a new pride in African American identity and community came to the fore and affected many domains of society including academia,” (Pickren & Burchett, 2014, p. 5). This new pride in African American identity and community led to the creation of the Association of Black Psychologists and subsequently an emphasis on the field of Black psychology, a term that was coined by Dr. Joseph White (White, 1970), in his seminal article, “Toward a Black Psychology.” In this article Dr. White introduced the idea of the existence of a Black Psychology in large part because White psychologists did not understand how to completely interpret and make sense of Black behaviors and experiences (Cokley, Palmer, & Stone, 2019, p. 113). Dr. White’s article was focused on conceptualizing Black people from a strengths-based perspective highlighting their resilience in a world that does not understand or value Black realities, which has also been echoed by participants in this study. One of the complaints by ethnic minority psychology graduate students from the late 1960s on was that much of the extant training had little relevance to the minority experience or to minority communities (Pickren & Burchett, 2014, p. 8). *Kay* and *Barry* share similar sentiments with regard to their training programs and the focus of the academic lessons therein. Thankfully, an empirical journal devoted to Black psychology exists.

The first issue of the *Journal of Black Psychology (JBP)*, edited by William David Smith, was published in 1974. This journal was created “to give a psychological view of Black people, particularly from the Black perspective” (Smith, 1974, p. 5). Smith goes on to say that, “we must be concerned with developing new and different ways of viewing the behavior of Afro-Americans other than the traditional psychological approaches that have been employed in the past century” (p. 5-6). Since the inception of the *JBP*, there has been an emphasis and desire to highlight and promote the resilience of Black people. That is to employ a strengths-based approach to understanding and enhancing the “psychological self” of Black people. Since the journal was created, there have been three different analyses of the articles within the *JBP* (Steele & Davis, 1983; Cokley, Caldwell, Miller, & Muhammad, 2001; Cokley, Awosogba, & Taylor, 2014), which help provide a sense of where the field of Black psychology has focused historically, the current direction, as well as to identify areas that need to be addressed. Steele & Davis (1983) who conducted the first analysis on articles published between 1974-1980, determined that areas concerning Black-African psychology, community psychology, and personality theories were most prevalent at the time of their investigation. The second analysis was conducted by Cokley et al. (2001), who utilized deductive and inductive procedures to determine the categories used in their content analysis, which included articles published from 1985-1999. The personality category and reactions and commentaries category accounted for the largest number of articles, the second largest category focused on social behavior research, the third largest category focused on physiological functioning and health psychology. While a category existed for education, it only accounted for 5% or less of the articles published from 1985-1999 (Cokley et al., 2001, p. 437). According to Cokley, Awosogba, & Taylor (2014) during the most recent analysis, the most popular areas of research and publication in the *JBP*

from 2000-2011 were in the categories of mental health and well-being, personality and identity (i.e., racial identity), culture, and physiological functioning and health psychology (p. 215).

Education and academic achievement accounted for 6% of the articles published from 2000-2011 (Cokley et al., 2014, p. 226). Cokley et al. (2014) also mentioned that, “the status of African-centered (also referred to as Afrocentric) psychological research is stagnant at best” (p. 233). Cokley et al. (2014) added, “This trend may reflect an uncomfortable truth that many current researchers are not trained in, and thus less guided by, African-centered paradigms created and used by an older generation of psychologists” (p. 233). This is highly valuable information and has implications for the need to expand the curriculum within clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs to include African-centered paradigms.

### **Experience of Being Black and Male in their Program**

In the results section, there is a brief overview of the demographics of the participants and their family dynamics growing up. However, the current section explicitly describes the experiences these students each had within their respective programs. The students that participated in this study each presented with unique experiences within their program as it relates to being Black and male. However, there were also many similarities and experiences that overlapped with the other participants.

*Kay* is the only Black person in his cohort and the only Black male in his program. He described not having close, intimate relationships with other students in his cohort. *Kay* believes that his being Black and male has a direct impact on his ability to build relationships with the other students. *Kay* also mentioned having experiences with a White professor in which *Kay* felt invalidated, especially as it pertains to discussions in class that include the issues of race and impact of racism on the clients that psychologists serve. *Kay* described having a Black male

advisor that is extremely supportive of him and is highly relatable. Kay has also been able to lean on the other students of color in his program (i.e. Black and Latino students) to gain insight regarding the program dynamics. Kay is the only participant from the current study enrolled in a clinical psychology doctoral program as well, which may contribute to the experiences of isolation that he may feel, given that these programs do not emphasize an appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism in the same way as counseling psychology training programs. Kay's research interests include research on anti-Black attitudes and racial bias, health inequities, and mental health inequities in the Black community. These research interests are in line with the sub-theme of giving back under the theme of action.

*David* indicated that he has received a great amount of support from his cohort members, which also have multiple Black students. David credits his cohort with helping him to remain accountable to completing the requirements of his degree, as his advisor was not always available to meet with him and provide the feedback that he was insistent on receiving. David did not appear comfortable enough to voice his concerns to his advisor because he did not disclose his antipathy regarding the lack of feedback he was receiving. It is also possible that he did not provide feedback on the lack of feedback he was receiving, as a result of the power dynamic between professors and their students. This experience of not receiving feedback from his professor is similar to his experience growing up when his parents encouraged him to decide on his undergraduate major and career for himself, with minimal influence from them. As David noticed that he wasn't getting what he needed from his advisor (i.e., availability and guidance), he was able to utilize his peers to fulfill his academic needs. This active approach in seeking supports to help negotiate active challenges is a strength that David was able to draw on. David's

research interests revolve around working with children and adults who have complex medical problems.

*Keith* expressed that his program could be isolating at times, but explained how he was very grateful for having two Black males in his program ahead of him, which helped get him acclimated to the new environment by providing him with information about local resources (i.e., Black barbershop). Aside from the environment outside of school, the Black students were able to help provide a more comforting environment while in the program. As the students began to transition out, he began to feel his support system leaving as well. Although there is another Black male student who recently entered the program, Keith expressed that the roles have reversed and he is now the Black male student that the new student is relying on for guidance and support. He also expressed wondering if White students feel the same responsibility to serve as a support for White students that come after them. He described that the flexibility of his advisor was very helpful for him, along with how his advisor modeled how to effectively navigate academia as a professor although his major professor was a White man. Keith's research interests include Black males and masculinity and their sense of belonging in spaces (i.e. educational, career, developmental, etc.).

*Barry* did not have a good experience in his program beginning with the death of his major professor after his initial semester in the doctoral program. Although his new advisor was a Black woman, she was not helpful in Barry's development over the next two years. There were a number of issues and concerns that arose for Barry which include funding, a lack of support from his advisor, and students withholding their participation in class discussions. Barry was one of two participants that were able to vividly recount instances of racism in their childhood and throughout life. Given Barry's awareness of individual racism (Franklin, 1999, p. 762), he was

sensitive to any actions that demonstrated differential treatment between White and Black students in his program. Eventually, Barry decided to stop participating during class discussions because he felt that White students were not being challenged to share their perspectives regarding their Whiteness in America and the advantages that being White inherently affords (i.e., White privilege). Barry's research interests include African American men and African American youth's perception of racism, how they navigate stress, and how they navigate their racial identity. Barry also wants to engage in research that will affect policy, to help aid Black people on a more macro-level.

*John* described having a good community of support that involved a high-quality relationship with his advisor and Black students within his cohort and program. He also mentioned that his program's faculty have a great representation of Black psychologists, which helped him to feel more comfortable during his selection process of potential programs to attend. *John* was the other participant that was able to provide an example of individual racism that he experienced before he entered the program. Although he has experienced this type of racism in the past, his response was markedly different than that of *Barry*, who operated with a hypervigilance about racist events occurring, *John's* support system served to buffer the effects of racist events, as he utilized Black students in his program to discuss and debrief regarding racialized instances when they did occur. This further demonstrates the importance of having a healthy community of support in place. *John's* research interests include Black women's intersecting identities and how the environment impacts their identity development.

Pickren and Burchett (2014) shared, "In their research on the differences in experiences between graduate students of color and those of European American descent, Maton et al. (2011) stated that 'students of color recognized both the shortcomings, and the strengths of their studies

in psychology and viewed their experiences with stereotyping in the classroom as ‘not something to accept and internalize, but rather something to challenge and negotiate’” (p. 14). Although stereotype threat has the capacity to negatively influence the academic performance of African Americans (Palmer & Maramba, 2011), this ability to negotiate stereotyping in the classroom requires a healthy level of personal resilience. Franklin (1999) describes personal resilience as “the individual’s effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one’s life history, which enhances one’s adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies” (p. 781).

The community of support becomes more critical and important at the doctoral level for Black students because of the “invisibility syndrome” (Franklin, 1999), given that students are in a heavy discussion based and feedback intensive program, yet they may not receive the recognition or validation they need from faculty or students with regard to their academic ability. Professional mentors and students of color are often utilized in lieu of traditionally recognized supportive persons such as family and friends (Brown, 2008), as it pertains to seeking support and validation within academic settings. The results of this study are commensurate with previous research.

### **Being Black in the Field of Psychology**

Being black in the field of psychology has presented many challenges (e.g., lack of representation, effects of invisibility syndrome (Franklin, 1999), and tokenism) and few quality supports (i.e., supportive advisors, professional mentors, and students of color). In Pickren and Burchett (2014), they mention that the “main drive for many students of color is to get a better understanding of their ethnic group, and the reason they chose psychology as their major was so that they could help those in their ethnic group,” (p. 14). Early in the history of psychology, Francis Sumner (1895-1954), during his tenure (1928-1954) at Howard University’s psychology

department, placed a priority on building a strong program in psychology (Guthrie, 2004, p. 155). In 1920, “Francis Cecil Sumner became the first Black man to receive the doctor of philosophy degree in psychology from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, a feat accomplished in spite of innumerable social and physical factors mitigating against such achievements by Black people in this country” (Guthrie, 2004, p. 214). Sumner went on to chair the department of psychology at Howard University and train many Black psychologists during his lifetime, embodying what it means to give back to his community. Sumner had interests including mental health and religion as well as the intersection between psychology and law (Guthrie, 2004, p. 229). As an active member of professional organizations and being heavily involved in research scholarship, he demonstrated and modeled to his students the promising possibilities of an academic career. This is a great example of how graduate students can thrive when representation (i.e., a Black professor) exists.

When lack of representation exists in a particular career field, it can create a level of doubt in the psyche of an individual. This was the case for Charles Henry Thompson (1896-1980), although he was the “first Black American to receive a doctoral degree in educational psychology, he had a strong desire to become a psychiatrist, but he decided on the study of educational psychology because he did not know of any Black person who was a psychiatrist at that time,” (Guthrie, 2004, p. 168).

Professional mentors and their guidance have been instrumental in empowering Black youth and families. This guidance was embodied by a Black psychologist by the name of Albert Sidney Beckham (1897-1964). During his career he has contributed in numerous ways to the Black community. For example, while he was a psychologist at DuSable High School he “developed parent counseling groups in which the study of adolescence helped mothers and

fathers to deal understandingly with their children” (Guthrie, 2004, p. 170). This was innovative and proved to have alternative benefits as it was the “first time in that community, a church-neighborhood-school relationship became viable” (p. 171). This was a great attempt at restoring the relationships that could help to foster resilience and self-efficacy within the children in that community. The benefits of having interconnected supports are exponential, especially with young children.

Previously mentioned psychologists and others named in Guthrie (2004), represent historical contributions of Black psychologists in the past, which involved some focus on the Black experience and how to rectify the conditions Black people were experiencing then and continue to face now. This highlights the many roles that Black psychologists embody within the field (i.e., educator, researcher, clinician, advocate, community leader). As more minorities entered the field of psychology, the field of psychology expanded. The field has more Black psychologists than ever before, however, that does not negate the fact that the educational and training programs as well as the field at-large could benefit from having more Black psychologists. As Black psychologists engage in research that is aimed at addressing issues within the Black community, that research will provide up and coming Black students in doctoral programs with the ammunition to combat systems of oppression through scholarship, as well as create a firm foundation for critically and intimately engaging with the Black community. As more Black psychologists enter the field and engage in this kind of research, the community may respond by beginning to trust in the practices and efforts of psychologists that intend to genuinely advocate for solutions to the concerns that negatively affect the Black community.

The students in the current study discussed how they are pursuing their doctoral degree because they want to engage in actions that involve giving back to their community in a variety

of capacities that include providing services to Black people, destigmatizing mental health in the Black community, and utilizing research to impact policy for the advancement of the Black community.

### **Implications and Relevance to Counseling Psychology**

The protective factors identified above provide a rich understanding of how Black male doctoral students in psychology have been able to navigate the difficulties and the demands of their programs. It is important to recognize that the intention here is to decenter Whiteness and focus on centering the experience of Black people who have been historically silenced (and have been expected to accept that silence) (Rondilla, Guevarra Jr., & Spickard, 2017, p. 8). As Rondilla et al. (2017) mentioned, “When there is an overemphasis on including Whiteness in every discussion, or on taking extra steps to avoid offending White people, we lose out on essential, though difficult conversations about race” (p. 8). Based on the results of the current study, there are several implications for a) Black male doctoral psychology students that can assist in their matriculation, as well as b) ways programs can heighten Black students experience regarding education and training within psychology. Limitations of this study are also addressed.

As it pertains to Black male doctoral psychology students, it is important for their well-being to have multiple supports in place both inside and outside of their program including (family, advisors, mentors, undergraduate faculty, graduate faculty, students, and friends). More specifically within their program they need to establish healthy relationships with faculty and students. This helps to mediate the barriers that often exist (i.e. unhealthy program dynamics and professors that behave in ways that are invalidating). Finding a program that meets every need may be impossible, but what aspiring Black psychologists can do before they apply to a graduate program is to seek out programs that have Black faculty as well as Black students who are

currently enrolled. Gathering an insider's perspective can provide valuable information about the dynamics of the program (i.e., value on multicultural concerns, cultural sensitivity, and overall warmth). Students are able to share about their experience and the climate of the program from a different perspective, which can help inform applicant's decision of whether the program will be able to provide an atmosphere that is most productive for their learning. It is ideal for a Black male doctoral student to have an advisor that possesses supportive qualities who is also culturally sensitive with a vested interest in the training and development of Black doctoral students. In Knox, Schlosser, Pruitt, and Hill (2006) they conducted a study aimed at "examining counseling psychology advising relationships from advisors' perspectives" (p. 508). They described the differences of the advisors' report of their advisees' positive traits based on the quality of the relationship between the advisor and their supervisee.

"Negative personal or professional characteristics were only identified by advisors describing their advisees in difficult relationships. For example, advisors indicated that their advisees were anxious, presumptuous, rigid, lazy, self-centered, irresponsible, avoidant, dependent, had poor work habits, and lacked clear boundaries" (Knox et al., 2006, p. 504).

Given this reality, once accepted into a program it is important for advisees and doctoral students to build healthy or "good" relationships that have healthy boundaries, respect, open communication, and similarities in career path between advisor and advisee (Knox et al., 2006, p. 507). Conflict occurred in both good and difficult advising relationships, but the more salient differentiating feature between these types of relationships was the way that advisors negotiated that conflict or power between advisor and advisees (Knox et al., 2006, p. 508). The invisibility syndrome can negatively impact interpersonal exchanges between advisors and Black advisees when the value of an advisee is not recognized and validated by an advisor. As students who identify as a racial minority, the chances of experiencing racial microaggressions from professors

or fellow students are increased. Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez (2019) described a number of reasons for people's failure to act in response to experiencing microaggressions: a) the invisibility of modern forms of bias, b) trivializing an incident as innocuous, c) diffusion of responsibility, d) fear of repercussions or retaliation, and e) the paralysis of not knowing what to do (p. 128). However, Sue et al. (2019) also provide a conceptual framework of microintervention strategies that serve as actionable steps for targets of microaggressions, White allies, and bystanders, which are divided into five categories: *strategic goals*, *objectives*, *rationale*, *tactics*, and *examples* (p. 134). There is an important component that must be taken into account while engaging in these microintervention strategies. As Sue et al. (2019) state, "Antiracism work is exhausting and seeking support and help from others is an aspect of self-care" (p. 139).

Intentionally seeking out supports within and outside of academic spaces has been instrumental for students to obtain the support they need to be successful in their matriculation to graduation. Social support from faculty and peers in a student's program, facilitates socialization into academic roles (Sweitzer, 2009). Researchers have found that Black doctoral students often have less than collegial relationships with White peers in their program (McGaskey, Freeman Jr., Guyton, Richmond, & Guyton, 2016) and in response often form very close relationships with Black graduate students in programs outside of their own. Additional opportunities to network and interact with Black professionals and students in the same field are through participation in local, regional, and national conferences. This is commensurate with professional relationships (i.e., Joe White's Freedom Train) and how they were established and cultivated at "The Set" (Cokley et al., 2019).

As it pertains to the education and training of counseling psychologists, programs are guided by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct or commonly referred to as the Ethics Code. Out of the Ethics Code, the *APA Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, & Organizational Change for Psychologists* were published (APA, 2003). As with the Ethics Code and the principles therein, "The term *guidelines* refers to pronouncements, statements, or declarations that suggest or recommend specific professional behavior, endeavors, or conduct for psychologists" (APA, 2003, p. 378). Although, there has been an updated version, *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality* (APA, 2017), they are aspirational at best. Whereas ethical standards are mandatory and may be accompanied by an enforcement mechanism. This leaves one to question how seriously multicultural concerns are being accounted for within academic, research, and clinical settings. There needs to be more accountability as it pertains to education (i.e., curriculum), research (i.e., including communities and using strength-based approaches), and practice (i.e., informed consent along with emphasizing how the client should be able to decide whether working with their clinician is a good fit).

Disparities in mental health care are especially disconcerting given psychologists' ethical responsibility to practice within the boundaries of their competence and to do no harm (Rogers & O'Bryon, 2014, p. 659). There is a heightened need to ensure that graduate students are equipped with the knowledge, awareness, and skills that inform culturally competent service. With the emphasis of counseling psychology training on providing services to racially and ethnically diverse clients, the field has advocated for "a transformation away from the prevailing Eurocentric philosophical and epistemological paradigms operating in psychology and for a shift

toward embedding a racially and ethnically sensitive lens across all features of the curriculum and the institutional setting (i.e., in courses, experiential activities, practicum and internship experiences, research endeavors, and student and faculty of color recruitment and retention” (Rogers & O’Byron, 2014, p. 662). Realizing the necessity of the shift in the field of psychology as it relates to training, Black men need to be supported and feel supported within academic spaces at the recruitment level, have supports available in and outside of their program, and have professors with supportive qualities (i.e., nonjudgmental, appreciating of diversity, open-minded, encouraging).

An actionable step that training programs can employ to assist in providing that supportive environment moving forward is to begin hiring more Black faculty and faculty of color. In order for Black male students to be successful in their doctoral programs, there must be intentionality with ensuring that supports which have shown to be effective are in place (i.e., Black faculty, Black advisors, Black mentors, Black students, and adequate funding for tuition and professional development activities) (McGaskey et al., 2016). This is further justifiable when taking into consideration the other beneficial aspects of training which involve the informal relationships with Black professors and professional mentors. Black mentors have been instrumental in the development of Black students, both men and women. In the March 2019 issue of *The Journal of Black Psychology* there were three conceptual articles dedicated to highlighting and sharing the impact and legacy of Dr. Joseph L. White on the field of Black psychology. Dr. Joseph L. White is known as the “Godfather of Black Psychology.” Franklin (2019) described Dr. White from the perspective of a colleague, friend, and family, as a translational scholar, who translated the Black experience for psychology and the Black public with his seminal article “Toward a Black Psychology” (White, 1970), published in *Ebony*

magazine. Franklin (2019) emphasized how the many contributions of Dr. White as a scholar helped to inform and impact his thinking and his work as a psychologist and scholar. Although, they were colleagues, Dr. White was there to support and encourage the work of Dr. A. J. Franklin. Dr. Franklin's research interests include psychological well-being, resilience and health of African Americans, the impact of stereotypes and invisibility upon African American males and females, psychotherapy and counseling interventions with adolescent and adult men and families, with a specialty on men of African descent.

Boyd-Franklin (2019) highlights Dr. White's style of mentoring, the impact of his scholarship on the field of Black psychology, and his impact on her professional development as a result of his mentorship. Boyd-Franklin (2019) shared how, "Dr. White expressed his availability and ever-present willingness to help younger professionals in terms of being a part of a "freedom train" of generations, in which the current psychologists of color would make a personal commitment to mentor the next generation as a way of giving back for the help that we received," (p.92). This "freedom train" helped to cultivate a professional extended family among Dr. White's mentees, which served to create supports and friendships that were reignited with every conference.

One of the main perspectives that Dr. Joseph White helped to facilitate for both Black community awareness and Black psychologists' imperatives included the notions that "Black psychology should build its own theory, do research based on our own hypotheses about Black life, and build interventions rooted in the strengths and resilience of Black lived experiences" (Franklin, 2019, p. 74). For example, "Joe, he saw decoding language and meanings within the lived Black experiences as one example of complex skills that attested to intellectual competency of Black people not measured by standard assessment practices," (Franklin, 2019, p. 77). This

mentorship that Dr. White embodied, helped to create a network of psychologists that are dedicated to addressing the concerns of the Black community. “Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin’s special interests include multicultural issues, the treatment of African-American families, ethnicity and family therapy, home-based family therapy, marital and couples therapy, the multisystems approach to the treatment of poor inner-city families, issues for women of color, the development of a model of therapeutic support groups for African-American families living with AIDS, and issues in working with African American children and adolescents”

(<https://gsapp.rutgers.edu/faculty/nancy-boyd-franklin>).

Training programs should also strongly encourage faculty members to engage in social justice mentoring. This will undoubtedly make some professors uncomfortable because of their own lack of awareness of biases and difficulties with discussing race. Engaging in social justice mentoring forces professors to challenge White students to dismiss the color-blind narrative that they may hold. Smith and Tuck (2016) explained that the pervasiveness of the color-blind narrative is one of the biggest cultural components complicating our capacity to engage in critical conversations about race (p. 33). Neville (2015) challenges counseling psychology professors to engage in aspects of social justice mentoring that include “(a) identifying core dimensions of social justice, (b) clarifying one’s social justice position, (c) modeling social justice values and practices, (d) providing meaningful learning and training opportunities, (e) working to transform learning and training spaces, and (f) encouraging students and trainees to create mentoring networks” (p. 162). Most importantly as it pertains to building and fostering a relationship, it is beneficial for students to have an advisor who clarifies their social justice position, so they can be informed during their decision when applying to programs, similar to what transpired for *John* (a participant in this current study). Neville (2015) argued that

articulating a social justice position allowed her to develop a “more explicit understanding which has enabled her to increase her transparency in course syllabi, selection of students she mentors, and in the actual mentoring relationship (p. 164). This is something all advising professors could do to help increase the probability of establishing a healthy, good, and productive relationship with their advisee. Although it is important to have professors and mentors to help guide students, what is most important are the qualities that these professors and mentors embody. It is not always the case that a Black student will have the luxury of having a Black advisor or Black professors in general, but having an advisor that is open, straight-forward, genuine, available, and understands how to challenge the student is necessary in creating the foundation for a strong working relationship (Neville, 2015). This will help with the students’ ability to communicate effectively with professors (Knox et al., 2006). It is also imperative that professors feel encouraged to engage in difficult dialogues (Chung, Bemak, Talleyrand, & Williams, 2018). Smith and Tuck (2016) highlighted how there are “four agreements” that are necessary for participation in “courageous conversations about race” which require conversation participants to 1) “stay engaged” in the conversation, 2) recognize that there will be moments in which you will “experience discomfort,” 3) “speak your truth” and honor others’ truths, and 4) expect and accept that such conversations may not end with “closure” (p. 34). Sue (2016) also highlights both ineffective and successful strategies for engaging in difficult dialogues about race, which could be a helpful resource for professors navigating these discussion in class.

Another actionable step training programs should engage in moving forward is to accept more Black students. In order for training programs to increase their cultural relevance and training regarding cultural competence, doctoral psychology training programs must intentionally recruit interested Black male prospective students through “working to transform

learning and training spaces” (Neville, 2015, p. 168). This can be accomplished through establishing undergraduate-to-graduate school feeder programs or pipelines from Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As of 2019, there are 247 APA-accredited clinical psychology programs and 76 APA-accredited counseling psychology programs in the U.S. (American Psychological Association, 2019). The majority of the students in the current study were in counseling psychology programs, which could be due to the similarity in values that are espoused by the profession of counseling psychology (i.e, importance of understanding context, appreciation for diversity, values, embracing social change, and a strengths-based perspective) (David et al., 2014). A helpful aspect of training programs is “to help students understand the cultural, political, and socioeconomic embeddedness of their lives” (Rogers & O’Byron, 2014, p. 666). In order for this to occur “they need to learn about racial and ethnic identity development theories, privilege, power, power dynamics and differentials, oppression, gender and sexual identity, social class, acculturation, worldviews, and social constructivism, among other topics and theories” (Rogers & O’Byron, 2014, p. 666). Along with recruiting and focusing on these important topics and theories, it would be helpful for training programs to develop curriculum addressing concerns and interests of Black students. This can be accomplished through anonymous surveys that target Black students to determine their interests. These are the kinds of efforts that demonstrate inclusivity and appreciation for diversity.

Beasley et al., (2015) discuss the importance of having more Black men in the field of psychology and how influential that can be clinically, academically, and in research. The current study serves to build off of their argument and highlight the protective factors and available supports that help to foster the resilience of Black male doctoral students in psychology. The effort to recruit more Black men into the field is in line with a long-term goal to a) reduce mental

health stigma, b) increase representation, and c) engage in culturally sensitive and relevant research for Black communities. There is a plethora of research indicating and expounding upon the disparities that exist within higher education at both the undergraduate and graduate level (enrollment rates, graduation rates, and gender differences between men and women). Research with this narrative often fails to address the contextual factors (i.e. historical, macro- and micro-systems) that negatively influence those statistics. However, there is limited research that utilizes a strengths-based approach to understand, lift-up, and share the experiences of Black male doctoral students in psychology. This may be the case because of the lack of representation of Black men at the doctoral level. Beasley et al. (2015) suggest training students who work from an African/Black psychology approach as this lens challenges the Eurocentric nature of psychological practice and training and questions its efficacy for facilitating the optimal well-being of African descent individuals (p. 708). They also mention that it is important to reach out to Black males in settings they are comfortable in (p. 710), encouraging Black male psychologists working in clinical settings to engage in outreach efforts. Furthermore, “it is imperative that we bring Black men into the conversation and incorporate their unique perspectives as psychological practitioners, educators, and researchers” (Beasley et al., 2015, p. 716). It is my hope that programs engage in hiring more Black faculty and faculty of color, accept more Black students, develop curriculum addressing concerns and interests of Black students, so that it helps to provide a supportive environment where racism and discrimination are not tolerated.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

The limitations of this study are pertaining to additional efforts that should have been implemented during data collection. The author should have explored other salient identities for

participants to better understand how they intersect and impact their experience (i.e., religious identity, sexual orientation, and SES). The participants were only questioned about how their identities of being Black and male impact their experience as doctoral students in their programs. Although there was space for participants to share about other salient identities and how they impact their experience, there was not added emphasis to bring those identities to the forefront of the discussion. Another limitation of the current study was that the racial identity of the participants was not accounted for. It may be helpful in the future to engage in a mixed method approach to understand how participants racial identity development factor into their experience and the impact that it has on resilience. Along with racial identity development, it would be interesting to understand the messages these students received regarding their race and their ability to overcome the adversities that awaited them (i.e., racial socialization). Additionally, it could be helpful to understand how one's self-efficacy contributes to the resilience of high achieving students. As it pertains to future research, it could be extremely validating to develop an understanding of students desired career paths and incorporate articles, books, and experiential opportunities that reflect students' interests (i.e., African-centered Psychology (Piper-Mandy & Rowe, 2010)).

### **Impact on Researcher**

Particularly, what I learned from conducting this study is that there is an extremely low number of Black males in the field of psychology, which seems to be detrimental in multiple ways, including training (i.e. lack of representation in class discussions)

I have had a chance to critically reflect on how my community of support has impacted my academic journey and career trajectory. As a child, I remember my aunt was the only person on my mother's side of the family that I knew who graduated with an undergraduate degree. She

was an influential role model, who helped instill the value of education since the age of 6 years old. My mother had a more active role in helping to navigate the logistics of applying to undergraduate institutions. I had a 2.9 out of 4.0 (GPA) grade-point average when I applied to the University of South Florida, the University of Central Florida, and Morehouse College for the 2006-2007 academic year. Morehouse College, an all-male historically Black college (HBCU) was the only school that I was accepted to. My mother drove me to the campus in Atlanta, Georgia and dropped me off. At Morehouse, I formed long-lasting professional relationships and relationships with students that continue to serve me along my career trajectory. In my doctoral studies, my advisor has embodied what it means to be a great professor and professional mentor.

In terms of my awareness, I have learned that programs are difficult and present unique challenges to Black students, especially when there is a lack of other Black students in the program. Aside from the rigor of doctoral education, program dynamics have the capacity to enhance or negatively impact the experience for doctoral students. *David* discussed how he was expending unnecessary energy determining how to best construct his dissertation committee members, so that he would not be negatively impacted as a byproduct of the grievances held between professors.

My desire to give back to the community has also been evident throughout my journey to the doctorate. Giving back has involved a process of giving my time, but I have also benefitted (i.e., professional development, professional relationships, and cultivation of non-professional relationships) through volunteering. I have been able to provide constructive feedback at a local conference for undergraduate students attending HBCUs in Atlanta, Georgia for four consecutive years. This exposure to psychological research and Black students in psychology, has helped me

to gain a better appreciation for the work of Black psychologists and professors in the field. It has also helped as an experience that I am able to account for on my curriculum vitae (CV), which is the document that is needed when applying to academic psychologist positions. Not only have I been able to gain professional development experience, but being a Black male serving as a judge for Black undergraduates' psychological research allowed me the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to help bolster self-efficacy within undergraduate students.

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Email

Greetings,

My name is David Stanley and I am a 4<sup>th</sup> year doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Edward Delgado-Romero in the department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in an interview about your experience of being a Black male in a doctoral psychology program. The current study aims to help us better understand the sociocultural factors that Black male doctoral students experience as they persist and complete their degrees (e.g. support from family, mentors, advisors, etc.).

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

- Currently enrolled as a doctoral level student in clinical or counseling psychology
- Self-identify as Black
- Self-identify as male

All data will be kept confidential, and only aggregate data collected from students will be reported. No identifying information will be collected in the research.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview that focuses on your life history, your various experiences with sociocultural factors, and the meaning you make of those experiences. The interview will be an audio-recorded semi-structured individual interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview protocol has three main research questions that will be used to guide the interview. An example of some interview questions are, “What is it like to be a Black man in your doctoral psychology program?” and “What things have you encountered that have been helpful?”

Upon meeting for the interview (in person or Skype), an informed consent will be provided. The current research study was approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (Protocol ID#STUDY00005232). If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at [dstanle1@uga.edu](mailto:dstanle1@uga.edu) or Dr. Edward Delgado-Romero at [edelgado@uga.edu](mailto:edelgado@uga.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu). Remember that your participation is voluntary and that you may discontinue at any time without penalty.

Also, please feel free to share with other participants who meet the inclusion criteria.

Thank you for your assistance in this research!

Sincerely,  
David Stanley

## APPENDIX B

## Recruitment Flier



**Understanding the Sociocultural Factors that Foster  
Resilience for Black Male Doctoral Students in  
Psychology**



**SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH  
STUDY. TO PARTICIPATE YOU MUST:**

- Identify as Black
- Identify as Male
- Be a doctoral student in Clinical or Counseling Psychology



**PARTICIPATION WILL  
INCLUDE:**

Interview (approx. 60-90 minutes) in  
which you will talk about your  
experiences in your doctoral program

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING OR WOULD LIKE  
MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

David Stanley, Doctoral Candidate - [dstanle1@uga.edu](mailto:dstanle1@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent

#### UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

#### Understanding Sociocultural Factors that Foster Resilience in Black Male Doctoral Students in Psychology

##### Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** Edward Delgado-Romero, Ph.D.  
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services  
Phone: 706-542-1812; Email: [edelgado@uga.edu](mailto:edelgado@uga.edu)

**Co-Investigator:** David Stanley, M.Ed.  
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services  
Email: [dstanle1@uga.edu](mailto:dstanle1@uga.edu)

##### Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to help us better understand the sociocultural factors that Black male doctoral students experience as they persist and complete their degrees (e.g. support from family, mentors, advisors, etc.). You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria: a) Currently enrolled as a doctoral level student in clinical or counseling psychology, b) Self-identify as Black, and c) Self-identify as male.

##### Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview that focuses on your life history, your various experiences with sociocultural factors, and the meaning you make of those experiences. The interview will be an audio-recorded semi-structured individual interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview protocol has three main research questions that will be used to guide the interview. An example of some interview questions are, “What is it like to be a Black man in your doctoral psychology program?” and “What things have you encountered that have been helpful?”

**Risks and discomforts**

This research study has limited potential risks associated with participation in this study. Some participants may experience emotional discomfort in reflecting on their experiences of being in their program. With participants revealing their thoughts regarding their experiences within their program, it is important to keep the participant's information confidential and their transcripts de-identified, to reassure the participants this information will not be shared with their current programs. Additionally, for participants interviewing over Skype, there is an inherent risk to the confidentiality of information when data is transmitted over the internet. If participants ask for additional support outside of their identified systems, I will suggest they speak with someone in counseling services.

**Benefits**

Participation in this study can be beneficial through providing an outlet for individuals who identify with a marginalized group of people (i.e. Black males) to share their experiences and various perspectives, all while contributing to our expanding knowledge base. As we better understand the sociocultural factors that help to foster resilience in Black male doctoral students in psychology, this information can be useful for future generations of Black men interested in psychology, as well as family members and mentors who are looking to provide the best support for these individuals.

**Incentives for participation**

There will not be any monetary incentive to participate in this study. However, through your participation you will help to contribute to the knowledge base of how to best support Black males in graduate level psychology programs.

**Audio/Video Recording**

I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document your responses. The audio from this study will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be coded. The investigator may use direct quotes from this study in future publications, however, all identifying information will be de-identified. Upon completion of the research, I will keep all copies of the interview and its transcription in a safe and secured location for one (1) year. After one (1) year all copies of the recording will be destroyed.

**Privacy/Confidentiality**

All information obtained during this research project will be treated confidentially. Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name and the real name of your college or university. As a way to ensure the trustworthiness of the information provided by each participant and interpreted by the researcher, the researcher will provide each participant with a copy of the interview transcript for their review. If any information is missing, misinterpreted, or needs to be redacted, the participant can notify the researcher of what needs to be updated. My major role is to serve as a researcher seeking to gain more knowledge about the participant's experiences. When reporting findings, the researcher will take care not to include details that may identify these locations. No affiliations will be used in the findings. The researcher will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project, without your written consent unless required by law.

**Taking part is voluntary**

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may withdraw your participation from this study without having to give me an explanation.

**If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is David Stanley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact David Stanley at [dstanle1@uga.edu](mailto:dstanle1@uga.edu) or Edward Delgado-Romero at [edelgado@uga.edu](mailto:edelgado@uga.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## APPENDIX D

**Interview Protocol****INTERVIEW GUIDE****Understanding the Sociocultural Influences that Foster Resilience for Black Male Graduate Students in Psychology: A Phenomenological Study**

Hi. My name is David Stanley and I am a 4<sup>th</sup> year doctoral candidate in the department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project attempting to understand the sociocultural factors that help to foster the resilience of Black male graduate students in psychology. Being a Black male graduate student in counseling psychology, I have my own thoughts, but I want to understand the experiences of other Black men to shed light on the protective and supportive factors that contribute to one's resilience. I appreciate you for taking the time to meet today to share your perspective regarding this topic.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. If at any time you decide that you do not want to continue, please let me know and you may end the interview at any time without penalty. The interview should take approximately one hour. If you have questions during the interview, please ask. Do you have any questions before we begin?

In order to get to know you better before I ask any specific questions.

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. Where you are from? (Probe: What were some good experiences you had there? What were some negative experiences you had there?)
  - b. Family Background (Probe: Number of siblings? Both biological parents?)
  - c. Field of psychology (Probe: Reasoning behind choosing this particular field?)
  - d. Career aspirations (Probe: Research interests, population(s) of interest?)

*Transition:* I would like to learn about your experiences as a Black man in your doctoral psychology program. In order to learn more about that, I have several questions that will guide our conversation and more may arise as we discuss. To begin...

Research Question: What is it like to be a Black man in your doctoral psychology program?

2. What is it like to be a Black man in your doctoral psychology program? (Probe: How has being a Black male impacted your experience?)

*Transition:* Now that we have talked about what it means to be a Black man in your doctoral program. Let's talk more about what your experience has been as you have matriculated through the program. To begin...

Research Question: What things or people have you encountered that have been helpful/not helpful?

3. What things have you encountered that have been helpful/not helpful? (Probe: What made those experiences helpful/positive or not helpful/negative?)
4. What people have you encountered that have been helpful/not helpful? (Probe: What made those experiences helpful/positive or not helpful/negative?)

*Transition:* So Black men are vastly underrepresented in the field of psychology. Also, psychology has historically been insensitive to the needs and concerns of people of color. With that being said...

Research Question: What does it mean to be a Black man in this profession?

5. What sense do you make of you in the broader field? (Probe: What does that mean for you? Your family? Your community?)
6. How do you see yourself in this profession?
7. What do you see yourself doing? (Probe: What does it mean to be in a position where you have an opportunity to create the changes you would like to see?)

Final Question: I know I have asked many questions of you throughout this interview. However, I want to give you the opportunity to share with me anything else that you would like to add. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Summary Statement: In the interview, I noticed several themes that were noticeable to me. These included (insert themes). Do you think I summarized these correctly? Are there any other things that stand out to you from the interview?

Wrap-Up: Again, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I appreciate you for taking time out of your day for this interview. If I have any follow-up questions later, may I contact you again?