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**FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN AMERICAN
STUDENTS' DECISION TO ATTEND GRADUATE OR
PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL**

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Aisha Denise Smith

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**FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' DECISION TO
ATTEND GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL.**

By

Aisha Denise Smith

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

FACTORS INFLUENCING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' DECISION TO ATTEND GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

By

Aisha Denise Smith

Attending graduate or professional school is becoming more of the norm in today's society. Although more African American students are attending and graduating from undergraduate institutions, the number of these students attending graduate or professional school, still lags behind the majority. The literature indicates that African American students have higher educational and professional aspirations than White students. However, these aspirations do not translate into action. The following study examined the role that institution type, several socialization agents, and students' attitude play in the decision to attend graduate or professional. Data was collected from two separate institutions. One institution was a Predominately White Institution (PWI) located in the Midwest. The other institution is a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) located in the South. Using a hybrid study design of both quantitative and qualitative data, a total of 128 students (PWI n = 52; HBCU n = 76) were surveyed. In addition, to the quantitative data, 12 students (6 from each location) were interviewed. This study was exploratory in scope and design. Data was analyzed using logistic regression and thematic coding. Based on the results of the data it is concluded that the most influential factor involved in assisting African American students make the decision to continue their education past undergraduate is the students' own educational and occupational expectations. These expectations are developed with the assistance of the students' family during the formative years.

To my Granny, thank you for paving the road to success. To my Mommy and
Daddy thank you for carrying me down that road when I was too weary to make the steps
myself.

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Thank you Jesus, for speaking this journey into my life. Thank you for all of the blessings that you have blessed me with. I am not worthy. I continue to give you all the praise and the glory. I know without you known of this could have been possible.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

A half-century ago, youth of America were instructed by their elders that to make it in the world, they must stay in high school and earn a diploma. A generation ago high school graduates were told, "To get a good job, you need a college education." Now the conventional wisdom is that to be successful in life, students should attend graduate or professional school. Progressively more African American students are heeding the call to advance their education. African American enrollment in graduate or professional school has increased each year since 1984. A recent report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that graduate school enrollment for African American's had increased 101.2 percent since 1976 (NCES, 2003). Today there are more than 158,000 African American students enrolled in graduate schools across the nation (NCES, 2003b). In addition, to the 158,000 African Americans enrolled in graduate programs, in 2000 there were 24,000 African Americans enrolled in professional schools. However rewarding these numbers are they are still well short of the percentage of the young African American adult population that would be eligible for graduate or professional school attendance (See Table 2). Even with these additions, African American enrollments at the undergraduate level and at every level of graduate and professional education lag behind that of Whites (Harvey, 2002) (See Table 1 & 2).

Table 1

Current Educational Trends for African Americans

<i>Degree Level</i>	<i>White, non-Hispanic</i>	<i>Black, non-Hispanic</i>
Associate Degree	408,508	60,181
Bachelor's Degree	928,013	107,891
Master's Degree	317,999	35,625
Doctor's Degree	27,492	2,220
Professional Degree	59,601	5,552

Table 2

Educational Attainment of Population 25 Years and Over

Total.....182, 211, 639

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Population 25 and over</i>	<i>Some College or More</i>	<i>Bachelor's degree or more</i>	<i>Advanced degree</i>
White, non-Hispanic	143,085,659	54.1%	26.1%	9.5%
Black, non-Hispanic	19, 858,095	42.5%	14.3%	4.8%

Countless, studies have been conducted examining the college achievement of African American students (Cole & Barber, 2003; Mickelson, 1990; Nettles & Perna, 1997; Steele, 1992; 1998). There is a large pool of research detailing the interaction and implications of numerous variables that influence African American retention and graduation in higher education. There are also numerous studies, pertaining to African American students retention and attrition in graduate or professional schools (Maton & Hrabowski, 2004). However, pertaining to graduate and professional school education, existing research is primarily of the descriptive variety-such as enrollment trends, graduation rates, or group differences. A study by Blackwell (1987) is a definitive example of this type of research. Blackwell examined each of the above areas

(enrollment trends, graduation rates, and group differences) for both graduate and professional schools. Although the information presented is quite informative with respect to changes in enrollment patterns and graduation rates, it is only speculative in identifying factors, which lead to successful educational outcomes.

There is widespread agreement among researchers that when socioeconomic factors are held constant, African Americans tend to have higher graduate or professional school aspirations than other groups (Hearn, 1991; St. John, 1991). Given these realities, researchers and policymakers must begin to ask several questions: Why do not more African Americans choose to participate in graduate or professional school? What are the missing links between their aspirations to participate and their actual participation in higher education? How can policies be implemented to better address how African Americans can turn their aspirations into reality and to integrate more targeted, workable programs/models? In order to answer these aforementioned questions several exploratory steps must first be taken. A study examining the factors affecting the decision to attend graduate or professional school for African American students is one of many steps needed.

Using the terms African American + Graduate Education, an exhaustive search of the literature using the search engines ERIC and PsycINFO was performed. This search rendered two studies, which previously examined African Americans and graduate education (Birkett & Kiel, 1995; Gray, 1978). The study conducted by Birkett and Kiel (1995) examined the attitudes towards graduate school of African American accounting students. The study included 141 African American junior and senior accounting students attending an HBCU. The results of this study indicated that the strongest

predictor of graduate school attendance was the respondents' own professional and personal goals.

The study conducted by Gray (1978) examined the factors that influence attendance to graduate or professional school among African American and White undergraduate students at the University of Iowa. The results of this study demonstrated that African American students were more determined to go to graduate school than White students. Additionally, this study revealed that African American students worried about (1) tuition being too expensive, and (2) graduate school lowering the standard of living.

These two studies laid the foundation for examining factors related to graduate or professional school attendance for African American students, however each study has various limitations. The study conducted by Gray was conducted more than 25 years ago. Many of the obstacles related to graduate or professional school education that African Americans faced may no longer be a reality. For example, the primary concern for African American students was tuition being too expensive. Today, there are many fellowships, grants, and loans that students can apply for in order to decrease the expensive cost of graduate or professional school. Another limitation of this study was that results were generalized across racial groups, thus assuming that the factors measured affected all racial groups the same. The study conducted by Birkett and Kiel (1995) also had various limitations. One limitation is the study sample only included accounting students attending an HBCU therefore generalizing the results to African Americans at PWIs or in different majors may prove to be difficult without assuming

group homogeneity. Additionally, factors were measured by only using one or two items, no scale validation or alpha levels were reported for any items used.

The lack of studies examining graduate or professional school entry indicates that scholars have paid little attention to the decision to go to graduate or professional school for persons of color. Social scientists are more likely to report that significant numbers of African American youth continue to experience difficulty in completing high school (Finn, 1989; Nettles & Perna, 1997; Slaughter, 1974; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003), earn lower grades and attain less education than their White peers (Finn, 1989; NCES, 2003, Nettles & Perna, 1997), and are more likely to drop out of school at all educational levels (NCES, 2003b). In particular, social scientists have been remiss in studying the positive educational decisions of African American students as a whole (Davis, 2000). As a result, there has been limited literature focusing on understanding how African American students come to the decision to obtain a graduate or professional school degree.

Factors related to seeking attendance to graduate or professional school will be examined. Recognizing that education does not occur in a vacuum several factors cited in the literature as important to educational processes will be examined. Specifically, this study will examine the characteristics of the individual student (personal); the immediate (family, school, peers, and professors) and broader (sociohistorical) environment; and how these three major components shape the student's behaviors and choices toward advanced education. In this framework, African American students are investigated within the contexts of their own cultural backgrounds and that of the society in which they live. All factors being examined have been cited in the literature as being important

factors when examining African American student achievement at the post-secondary level.

Conceptual Framework

The criticism of most psychological theories and models of behavior is that they emphasize individual behavior change process and pay little attention to sociocultural and physical environmental influence on behavior. To overcome this limitation an exploratory study broadly using the ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) will be conducted. The ecological framework is being utilized broadly to provide the rationale for examining the specific factors outlined within the study. Specifically, the role that environment has on the individual and the socialization agents (family, peers, and mentors) responsible for students' decision to attend graduate or professional school will be examined. An ecological framework is important to this study because according to this theory, development is the result of the interaction between the person and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This organizing model can be used to understand the problems encountered in adapting to different environments. In the ecological model, the macrosystem is the all-encompassing environment exerting direct and, at times, indirect influence on all the other systems. This environment includes "cultural, social, political, legal, economic, religious, and educational values" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of a nation. The macrosystem is most easily described as the sociopolitical climate of the nation. The individual social relationships in which the student is involved are called microsystems. These include the relationships between the student and their family members, in-and-out of school friends, professors etc.

Study Rationale

Programs designed to motivate and support disadvantaged African American undergraduate students have been in place since the late 1960's. These programs were first implemented after President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10925. This order used affirmative action for the first time by instructing federal contractors to take "affirmative action to ensure that applicants are treated equally without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Affirmative action was based on the premise that there had been over three hundred years of discrimination based on gender and race in this country (Pullen, 2000). Thus, affirmative action was implemented to help "qualified" people of color advance at the same rate as their White counterparts. In addition, affirmative action programs were to help ensure "equity" and "equality" in the workplace and education specifically. The educational training programs developed following this act were a form of affirmative action; these programs were designed and implemented to ensure that high achieving students of color received equal skills and training needed to matriculate in graduate or professional school.

Currently, there are two primary educational training programs at the undergraduate level for underrepresented graduate school populations: McNair/SROP and Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC). Each year, these two programs each separately receive several million dollars in federal aid to continue with programming (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2002). The McNair/SROP Program is a federally funded program (Department of Education), which awards grants to institutions of higher education for projects designed to prepare participants for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly

activities. The MARC Program is a federally funded program (National Institute of Health). The MARC Program was created by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) to increase the number of biomedical and behavioral scientists from minority groups. A key objective of the MARC Program is the encouragement of minority students in the pursuit of graduate training leading to a Ph.D. In addition to these major federal initiatives, there have been smaller state and federally funded programs implemented at various institutions. For example, the Minority Research Initiative (MRI) at The Ohio State University. This is a NIH-funded program aimed at preparing students of color for life science careers.

Given the significant amount of state and federal resources directed at increasing African American students' entrée to and graduation from institutions of higher education over the past 50 years, one would believe that the number and percentage of African American students graduating from post-secondary institutions and entering into graduate or professional schools should show significant signs of improvement. Current national data on the academic success of African American students do not show this to be true (NCES, 2003). Studies need to be conducted to examine why this is the case.

The lagging educational numbers of students of color, continue to plague their future economic standing. Higher education has a great influence on the economic well being of the nation and its citizens (Freeman, 1998). Often, the level of education determines the nature of social stratification in society and where on the social ladder a family may be. Furthermore, usually a student's performance and educational success will significantly impact the job opportunities available to the student (Tinto, 1993).

Research has established there is a significant relationship between income earnings and educational attainment. For instance, the average income of college graduates is significantly higher than the income of non-college graduates. A recent report, “Current Population Survey, Educational Attainment in the United States,” shows that more education means more take-home pay and reduced chances of unemployment. Earnings go up progressively with each additional year of school completed (NCES, 2003b; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003).

The low graduate or professional school rate of African American students is one that requires immediate attention. Without African American students actively seeking to obtain higher education degrees, the African American community will continue to lag behind that of the mainstream culture (Barton, 2004). One continuing and major challenge is the under-representation of African Americans among leading professionals in various sectors of society, including health care, university professors, and research scientists (e.g., Barton, 2004; Cole & Barber, 2003; Wilson, 2000). The under-representation within critical leadership groups is not only socially unjust but is detrimental to society’s long-term vitality. Increasingly, the pathway to enhanced representation in most leadership areas is through education, including graduate or professional school (Maton & Hrabowski, 2004). To alleviate this under-representation, the culture of the racial group in question needs to be examined in detail. Each culture is different therefore solutions to problems encountered by a specific population cannot be examined by measuring other populations. Culturally specific studies need to be conducted to understand the exact factors influencing that culture’s behaviors. This is

clearly the case for the proposed study. The unique factors attributed to African American students decision to obtain a graduate or professional school degree will be examined.

Purpose of Study

Various educational studies indicate that attending graduate or professional school (at one time an educational pattern pursued by only a small percentage of college graduates) has become more and more commonplace (Harvey, 2002). Graduate and professional schools provide students with opportunities to satisfy the nation's expanding need for highly educated people in all areas. Unfortunately many capable students do not take advantage of these opportunities and few studies have been conducted to understand the lack of graduate or professional school attendance. The purpose of this research study is to explore the factors related to African American undergraduates students' decision to apply to graduate or professional school. Two separate types of institutions will be examined. The rationale for this is that the culture at each institution is different. As a result, the factors influencing African American students' decision to attend graduate or professional school may differ depending on the institutional type. Since this is a first investigation, the researcher is attempting to understand if the factors differ by setting, rather than assuming that all factors will affect all African American students the same.

Chapter II

Review of the Related Literature

The basic design of this study, as described in the previous chapter, is to identify the different factors that influence African American students' decision to obtain a graduate or professional school degree. This chapter is a survey of the literature important to this research. The study of undergraduate experiences is not the primary purpose of the proposed study, however, several of these studies will be utilized. The researcher is hypothesizing that the same factors, relevant to success in undergraduate are the same factors that will prove influential when deciding to attend graduate or professional school.

For purposes of organization, the literature related to this study will be divided into several parts. First, the ecological perspective will be briefly explained. For the purpose of this study primary focus will be placed on the micro and macro system as defined by the ecological model. While discussing each system, the factors being measured will be discussed.

The Ecological Perspective

A focus on the individual, isolated and independent, is deeply embedded in our culture and values. In contrast, an ecological model emphasizes the interconnections of events and the bi-directionality of effects between organism and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An ecological perspective views human development from a person-in-environment context, emphasizing the principle that all growth and development take place within the context of relationships. The ecological model, the major proponent of which is Bronfenbrenner (1979), seeks to explain individual

knowledge, development, and competencies in terms of the guidance, support, and structure provided by society and to explain social change over time in terms of the cumulative effect of individual choices (Berger & Milan, 2000). In essence, the ecological perspective studies the coercive power of the environment over human behavior. It studies both environments and the people who are part of the environment, but greater emphasis is placed on extra-individual variables. Using this theory, a student must be studied in the context of the educational environment and the educational environment must be understood within the context of the larger society.

For the purpose of this study, primary focus will be placed on students' development as it interacts with the variables involved in the microsystem and the macrosystem. Understanding the students' microsystem is important to include within the formal definition of the developing person's immediate environment because of the developmentally relevant characteristics of the persons present and participating in that environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Placing attention on the macrosystem is important to development, because this is where the students' ideals, values, and beliefs are shaped by the larger society. The macrosystem may be thought of as the societal blueprint for a particular culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since the linkages and interaction between the various factors is beyond the scope of this study, it is not relevant to include the exosystem and mesosystem within the ecological model. Even though the macro and micro systems are being discussed, it is to be understood that the theory is only being broadly utilized. The primary purpose of the ecological model is to provide a rationale for the factors being examined.

Factors in the Macrosystem

The macrosystem is the overarching characteristics of a particular society. To fully understand how an ecological ideology specifically as it relates to the macrosystem is appropriate for this study, the history of the educational process for African Americans in this country will be discussed. The history of education in the United States can directly influence students' values pertaining to education and their perceived ability to succeed in academia.

Review of Access in Higher Education for African Americans. Due to discrimination and other detrimental factors, African American participation in higher education in the United States was limited during the early history of postsecondary education (Babaoye, 2000). The gates to institutions of higher learning were closed to African Americans until major events in the United States secured admission for all Americans at all levels of the educational arena (Babaoye, 2000).

One of the significant events attributed with assisting in securing educational opportunities for all Americans was the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890. The Morrill Act is considered a catalyst in the shaping of the landscape of American higher education from sectarian tendencies of the past to an egalitarian educational system (Allen, 1992). Due to social and economic changes in America, the Morrill Act gave citizens from farming, mechanics, and racially different backgrounds the opportunity to participate in higher education. The Morrill Act played a major role in this regard for many reasons and was instrumental in the establishment of HBCUs. This act secured state support for higher education, provided land for their operation, changed the

American college system, and promoted the establishment of different kinds of institutions, such as vocational schools (Allen, 1992; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986).

Even though the Morrill Act was passed, educational equality did not follow. In order for African Americans to receive a public education like their White counterparts, two separate state systems were set up, one Black and one White (Babaoye, 2000). As a result of a two-tier system for race, the Supreme Court ruled on the Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) case. The court determined that Blacks and Whites should have their own facilities; separate but equal. The results of this court decision influenced enrollments for the next 30-40 years for institutions of higher education (Thomas & Hill, 1987). The next major turning point for Black colleges and universities occurred following the landmark desegregation case, Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education (1954).

This case focusing specifically on elementary and secondary education held that segregation by its very nature caused fiscal inequities between schools servicing African American and White students. The case ordered that states desegregate their schools. Before the *Brown* decision was enacted, only 2.2% of African Americans and other people of color over 25 years of age had graduated from college (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1985). This case was followed by additional decisions applying specifically to higher education. Later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited spending of federal funds on segregated schools and colleges. The Civil Rights act forced secondary and post-secondary institutions to implement the Supreme Court's decision (which resulted in White hostility towards African American students on campus). The Higher Education Act of 1965, which provided financial aid to individual students who otherwise could not afford post-secondary education, followed this court decision.

As a result, the 1960s and 1970s were periods in which America experienced the largest student enrollment increase in its history (Babaoye, 2000). The open admissions policy adopted by most institutions of higher learning in order to make educational opportunity available to every American is the major contributor of the college enrollment boost. Over 80 percent of American colleges and universities implemented this governmental policy or used some form of special admissions to recruit African American students. By granting African Americans access to higher education, “the United States hoped to gradually dismantle the remnants of its past history, so that African Americans, could have the opportunity of climbing the social ladder as well as raising their standard of living, reaching their potential, living the American dream, and partaking of their piece of the pie” (Babaoye, 2000). The hopes of obtaining the American dream has been realized by several persons of color, unfortunately, these numbers still do not represent the demographic makeup of society.

Today, forty years after the Civil Rights Movement, both the mood of the country on racial issues and the state of higher education have transformed. The national moral response to African American demands for equality has been replaced with ambivalence and the persistent problems associated with downturns in the nation’s economy. Higher education generally has moved from a period of boundless expansion and optimism to one of retrenchment and financial constraint. Under the rubric of “no preferences” critics of affirmative action have used lawsuits, ballot initiatives, and other means to halt or alter the use of race as a criterion when evaluating candidates for education or employment (Babaoye, 2000). This has been reflected in a dilution in higher education’s commitments to African Americans and other persons of color. The participation of

African American students in higher education fluctuates from year to year.

Additionally, African American faculty and administrators have remained a minute proportion of the tenured and senior staff in predominantly White colleges and universities.

The historical development of education within the United States may be directly responsible for the image (both positive and negative) that many persons of color have about education. The image that individuals have may directly affect their attitudes and their decisions to participate in the educational process. For example, if individuals believe that the system is racist and that no amount of education will change their ability to succeed in this country, they will be weary about continuing their education.

Barriers to Graduate or Professional School Entrance. The problem of access to graduate and professional schools for students of color has received less attention in the literature than has the problem of access to undergraduate institutions. Much of what has been studied is similar to that found in the undergraduate literature. Many authors have identified educational barriers as a major obstacle with which college graduates must contend upon applying to graduate or professional school (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985).

Standardized test performance, grades and other formal and informal measures of achievement are usually the first variables considered by graduate institutions. Initially, too high a proportion of students of color attend elementary and secondary schools that fail to provide them with the adequate educational background necessary to enter any undergraduate institution (Bayton, Roberts & Williams, 1970). Many of those who do manage to utilize their skills and talents to successfully enter college subsequently fall behind academically due to being under prepared.

Another major area of focus involves the issue of recruitment (Thomas, 1986). In their study of graduate schools, Boxley and Wagner (2001) found, in general, that recruiting procedures were sparse and uncoordinated. Also, in some instances, there are discriminatory subtleties that exist within the recruitment policies and procedures of many graduate institutions. Many qualified students of color are overlooked, because recruitment strategies fail to target their institution (Boxley & Wagner, 2001). This is particularly a problem for students attending HBCUs. The perceived educational quality of these institutions is considered to be below par by some graduate schools, as a result graduate schools chose not to target these institutions as recruitment sites. Also with regards to recruitment, some graduate schools fail to provide students of color at PWIs with useful information about the educational possibilities available to them. Another crucial component, letters of recommendation, can hamper the student of color during the admissions process. If the student attended a PWI they may not have had much opportunity to form contacts with professors who could provide a quality recommendation for the student.

Barriers to admittance could have an impact on how African American students shape their attitudes about graduate or professional school. Once these attitudes are formed, they could directly impact students' decisions to attend graduate or professional school. If students feel that they cannot gain entrance into a graduate or professional school they may not apply. Research studies indicate that African American students have higher educational aspirations than other ethnic groups (Ponec, 1997). Yet these aspirations do not translate into actual attendance. The reason for this might be that African American students think they cannot succeed in the current educational system.

Although students desire to continue their education, they may feel that continued education is not possible. Negative stereotypes of African Americans may become internalized and affect how students perceive themselves and their academic ability. Thus, negatively skewing their attitudes towards education.

Factors within the Microsystem

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The norms, values, and assumptions of the larger culture, within the macrosystem level, affect the microsystem level in a number of ways. For example, stereotypes of African Americans may negatively affect students' career development regarding how others view them and the expectations they have for them. For the purpose of this study specific attention will be placed on the institutional setting, family influences, peers' attitudes toward education, and faculty (mentoring) relationships and the role that each factor plays in African American students educational success and development.

Institutional Setting. The historical development of educational processes for African Americans within the United States and the current state of the higher educational system directly affect the university in which students are housed. Researchers would be remiss if they overlooked the detrimental roles that these institutions play in students' development. To further illustrate this point, the next section will focus on institutional settings and climate. The role that the institutional setting plays in affecting student development will be discussed.

Relevant to the success of African American college students is the environmental hypothesis factor. “The increasing numbers of African American students matriculating make it imperative that more be learned about institutional factors and conditions that seem to foster their learning and personal development” (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996, p. 257). Several researchers have documented the relevance of university environment to students’ achievement (Bennett, 1984; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1991; Allen, 1992): type of institution, racial diversity and institutional size are among these factors.

Studies examining institutional environment indicate that African American students often feel isolated and alienated in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and do not feel included in the college environment (Nettles, 1991; Allen, 1992;). As a result of these feelings, African American students may experience difficulties matriculating successfully. These findings suggest that African American students need support, inclusion and acceptance in order to fit in the mainstream college environment. African American students can excel in an environment, which promotes inclusion and acceptance, thus promoting an atmosphere of acceptance. For example, of the number of African Americans who earned their doctorates, about 35 percent attended an HBCU at the baccalaureate level (Nettles & Perna, 1997). Moreover, among the 5,284 African Americans who received their doctoral degrees between 1991 and 1995, twenty-one percent, or 1,122, received their undergraduate degrees at 15 HBCUs. Additionally, a study conducted by Freeman (1998) cited, African American students show stronger intellectual confidence and a greater feeling of success and satisfaction with academic life compared to their counterparts attending PWIs. Studies also indicate that students who attend HBCUs have better relationships with faculty and mentors (Harvey, 2002),

achieve higher academic marks than African American students at PWIs, and are more likely to attend graduate school (Harvey, 2002).

Further, adding to the importance of institutional setting is a study conducted by Fleming (1997). Fleming (1997) found that in White institutions, “from a theoretical point of view, African American students experienced feelings of disconnectedness and that a process of alienation could be observed” (p. 66). These students did not report that they experienced academic and social integration or feelings of belonging. These students were perplexed because they were admitted with good academic credentials and did not expect to experience feelings of an outsider. These negative experiences thwarted academic development because the environment was not inviting.

Researchers Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, and Terenzini (1995) summarized the position on environment in relation to African American students at historically Black institutions by suggesting that the supportive environment has made it possible to create a social-psychological climate that not only fosters satisfaction, a sense of community, and adjustment to college, but has also increased the likelihood of persistence and degree completion. The findings further revealed that the supportive campus environment of historically Black institutions did not come at the expense of intellectual rigor (p.82). These authors also concluded that cognitive effects of college-race composition were general rather than conditional. This means that they were not significantly influenced by a student’s individual characteristics, such as gender, pre-college aptitude test, academic motivation, age, and socio-economic origins.

Students of color are faced with many barriers in their quest of obtaining academic success and social acceptance in their pursuit of attaining a college degree at

PWI's. Problems associated with matriculation are inclusive of "blatant and subtle barriers" related to discriminatory practices (Heath, 1992). Barriers to obtaining a college education are inclusive of but not limited too: a) alienation, b) isolation, c) racism, d) discrimination and e) intimidation. In essence, college should represent a 'rites of passage' for those who chose to attend. The college experience should offer to every student continuing development of personal, social, maturational and collective endeavors. However, for those students who feel they are not wanted, the college environment can have a devastating impact on African American and other students of color (Bohr et al., 1995).

Given the findings of these studies, what are the consequences, then, when African American students face racism, isolation, alienation, and lack of emotional support at PWIs? African American students who face these barriers at PWIs invest more energy into social engagement, rather than academic activities according to DeSousa and Kuh (1996). As a result, their academic achievement suffers and these students are less likely to persist. Acts of discrimination and campus racism, no matter how subtle, can cause enduring harm to the psyche, inclusive to evoking a decrease in self-esteem, underdeveloped personal identities and retarded cognitive and affective development, thereby shaking confidence and leading to feelings associated with a sense of isolation and alienation, depression, dissonance and even at times the discontinuance of education (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996).

Based on the inclusive findings of many research studies it is concluded that African Americans attending HBCUs have richer learning environments and experiences

than those at PWIs. Thus demonstrating the importance of understanding the ecology of these institutions as it relates to the academic achievement of students.

Peer influence. Within the general social support literature, meaningful ties to one's peer group are thought to promote child competence, psychological well-being and the ability to cope with life stress (Diclemente, 1993). Additionally, the impact of peer influence on academic achievement is well documented, and has been associated with adolescents' motivation on subsequent academic achievement in numerous studies (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Epstein, 1983; Kindermann, 1993; Steinberg, Dornbush & Brown, 1992). It has been found that students who have many friends, strong relationships with peers and open communication with their peer group enjoy high degrees of academic success (Berndt, Laychak & Park, 1992). Belonging can also influence the value adolescents place on academic work. Students who believe their friends view school success as important are more likely to have a positive attitude in terms of their schoolwork and view education as being important (Berndt, Laychak & Park, 1992).

Despite findings that have linked peer influence to both positive and negative outcomes across several domains (Brown, 1986; Clasen & Brown, 1985), researchers have continued to examine solely the negative effect of peer influence. Limited attention has been placed on the positive aspects of peer influence, specifically when investigating African American adolescents (Taylor, 2000). For example, several researchers have contended that African American students' resistance to the ideal that education is a viable resource for upward mobility contributes significantly to the gap in academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found

that the African American students they studied equated doing well in school with “acting White.” As a result of this hypothesis, Steinburg, Dornbush and Brown (1992) argue that African American students receive less support for achievement from their peers of the same ethnic background, and do not fare as well in school as White students.

Researchers argue that this resistance to academic excellence manifests itself in active discouragement of academic achievement, such that those who dare to do well suffer socially as a consequence to their academic success (Ford, 1991; 1993). Ford (1993) found that the high achieving (as measured by achievement tests) African American students investigated, often underachieved to avoid teasing and ostracism by their fellow classmates. Therefore, in order to gain acceptance from their classmates, these over achieving students did not perform to their potential, and expressed less interest in their schoolwork and school related activities.

Although this convincing research may begin to explain the reasons in which some students do not do well in school, this work fails to account for some of the contextual factors within the school that may moderate or mediate oppositional attitudes toward school (Taylor, 2000). For instance, the culture of the school, that is, the school’s system or organization can prove to be either a motivating or discouraging force in academic achievement (Eccles & Midgley, 1984), depending on whether or not it is a culture of inclusiveness or separation. Moreover, the availability of peers who endorse achievement-related behaviors may serve as a buffer from negative attitudes, and a school culture that is not conducive to the motivation of their students (Taylor, 2000).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) generalized the students’ attitudes and values in one school to all African American children. In so doing, they failed to acknowledge the

diversity in attitudes and values that exist among African American students. Therefore assuming that all African American students are the same. Senior and Anderson (1993) conducted a study which refuted the hypothesis proposed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). Senior and Anderson (1993) found that students in the urban, predominantly African American high schools they studied respected the “smart but popular” students the most, which demonstrates that some African American students do respect academic success and the students who do well in school.

The existing research on peer influence as it relates to the academic achievement of African Americans has provided a reasonable, but incomplete picture of the role of the peer group. Although, there is evidence to support both positive and negative interactions among adolescents and their peers, in general, researchers have chosen to focus on the negative aspects of peer interaction when investigating African Americans (Taylor, 2000). Just as a link has been established between negative peer influence and academic outcomes for African American students (Berndt, Laychak, & Park, 1990; Berndt & Keefe, 1995), a similar link may be established between positive peer influence and academic outcomes (Epstein, 1983). This connection has been made between positive peer influence and academic outcomes for White students. When examining the ways in which peers can impact the academic achievement of African American students, “it is important to investigate the impact of positively oriented peer influences as related to academic achievement” (Taylor, 2000). One way to think about this issue is to examine the effects of peer support on adolescents’ academic outcomes when students’ peers exhibit positive attitudes about education.

Family factors. The research on the relationship between parenting practices and family processes to student achievement is vast and has grown explosively in the past few decades (Brookhart, 1998; Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Guay & Vallerand, 1997; Peng & Lee, 1993; Reay & Ball, 1998; West, Noden, & Edge, 1998). It is widely assumed that the family is of critical importance in fostering achievement motivation and overall academic success from close and supportive families that provide strong direction in terms of education (Peng & Lee, 1993). The relationship between family variables and academic achievement has been recently studied from two different perspectives: (a) the relationship between achievement and sociofamily factors (i.e. parents' expectations about children's achievement and future work, educational habits, economic and cultural characteristics, etc.) and (b) the relationship among achievement, learning processes, and how the family is involved in these learning processes (i.e., specific ways in which parents' behavior influences children's self-regulation, learning processes, and academic achievement) (Gonzalez-Pienda, Nunez, Gonzalez-Pumariega, Alvarez, Roces, & Garcia, 2002).

Two kinds of research can be distinguished regarding parental involvement in children's education (Gonzalez- Pienda, et.al., 2002). First, some researchers strive to demonstrate how parental behaviors affect children's motivation, self-concept, concentration, effort, attitude and other characteristics. These researchers presuppose that parental variables will significantly affect their children's subsequent learning and achievement, once the children become aware of how they use their cognitive processes and strategies. Second, some researchers explore how parents become involved, either

favoring or hindering the learning process via their influence in self-regulation behaviors (Gonzalez- Pienda, et.al., 2002).

Most studies pertaining to parental involvement relate to the role that parents play at the secondary level. However, a study conducted by Baird (1973) indicates the importance of this involvement to postsecondary education. Baird reported that compared to other students college seniors who did not plan to continue to advanced study were less often encouraged to go on by their parents. The students who planned to attend graduate school reported considerably more encouragement, and students who planned to study law or medicine reported even more encouragement.

In addition to what research indicates about the influences on all students, the ways in which African American families impart values concerning higher education differ from other ethnic groups (Ford, 1993). Historically, education has been a preferred method of social improvement of the poor (Billingsley, 1968), too many of whom are disproportionately African American. Believing in the old adage that “knowledge is power”, African Americans have struggled for generations to provide educational opportunities for their children. Enix (1988) reported that perhaps most of today’s African American professionals come from families where their parents’ educational achievement were modest. Yet, African American parents generally expect their children to take advantage of opportunities that they were denied and to surpass them in achieving the comforts of life (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982).

Additionally, in cases where members of the immediate family (mother or father) are not in a position to influence the decision process, the role of the extended family in influencing African American students’ choices to participant in higher education is

particularly noteworthy. In a study by Levine and Nidiffer (1996), the students who participated listed “other family member” as the person most influential in their decision to participate in higher education.

Student and mentoring relationships. Whereas mentoring has long been associated with the apprentice model of graduate education, it is increasingly looked to today as a retention and enrichment strategy for undergraduate education (Rowe, 1989). Growing literature attests to the importance of mentors in undergraduate education (e.g. Hughes, 1988; Moses, 1989; Rowe, 1989). Satisfaction experienced by African American college students in their academic environment is partly related to their experience with their professors’ instructional techniques and faculty commitment to personal and academic development (Astin, 1993).

Whereas, direct support for the hypothesis that mentoring promotes academic success is largely missing, several related areas of study provide indirect support. A large body of literature indicates that contact with faculty is linked to academic success. Student and faculty relationships, in general, are conducive to motivating students toward academic achievement based on satisfaction with the environment, quality of instruction, personal contacts with instructors and commitment of the faculty (Astin, 1993).

Faculty-student interaction is important to African American students for several reasons. For some African American students, the maintenance of their interest levels toward achievement does not just rely on the students themselves but also on the professors who show interest in their academic development and personal excellence (Fleming, 1997). Additionally, Wilson (2000) stated that emphasis should be placed on the academic and social interaction between African American students and their

teachers; this is crucial for social learning within the school environment. Madhere (1991) similarly stated that in order for a discernible improvement in the scholastic achievement among African Americans to develop there must be a redirection of the relationship between teachers and learners that ensures an interactive mode, thus sustaining a positive self-concept. Although this may be the case for any college student, it is relevant for explaining factors that influence the academic achievement of some African American students. Sedlacek (1997) reviewed other studies in which faculty accessibility and support was proven to be a powerful influence. This study discovered that faculty contact outside of class was determined to be a significant predictor of grade point average (GPA) for African American students, especially for African American undergraduates at predominantly White colleges. Sedlacek reviewed studies which stated that the lack of a variety of viewpoints and perspectives relevant to African American students and the absence of powerful African American role models had direct effects on the loneliness and isolation felt by this group, as well as their learning, development, and identification with the institution.

The relationship between mentoring and academic success raises additional questions and concerns when the research focus is on the attendance of students of color at predominantly White institutions. Because the leadership and faculty of these colleges and universities are traditionally White and male, students of color may have less access to informal networks and other sources of social support.

Summary

In summary, the researcher provided literature on the factors utilized by African American students to regulate their motivation for academic achievement. The factors

examined related directly to the environment in which students participate. There are a myriad of factors relating to the success of undergraduate students as well as the barriers that exist for students of color in graduate or professional school. Specific attention was given to the factors that the researcher believed would directly assist African American students in their decision to attend graduate or professional school.

Research Questions

In this study factors related to applying for graduate or professional school for African American students were examined. The ecological model was used broadly to provide the rationale for the variables measured. This study was exploratory and descriptive in scope and design. For the purpose of this study all questions and items included in the study measurements focused on intentions to attend graduate or professional school rather than actually completing a graduate or professional school program.

The researcher wanted to understand the students' decision to attend graduate or professional school and how it is influenced by several factors as defined by the ecological model.

The primary questions guiding this research were:

1. What is the role that environment (institution type) plays in African American students' decision to apply to graduate or professional?
2. What is the role of major socialization agents-family, mentors, peers-in contributing to African American students' decision to apply to graduate or professional school.

3. Do African American students' attitudes toward education affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school?
4. Do African American students' perceptions of their academic ability affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school?
5. What is the role of all of these factors (socialization agents, attitude toward education, and perceived academic ability) in the decision of African American students to attend graduate or professional school?
6. How do African American students' construe the decision to attend graduate or professional school?

Chapter III

Methods

Few studies have focused exclusively on African American students and influential factors assisting in their decision to attend graduate or professional school. As a result of the lack of empirical studies regarding this topic this research is still in the infancy stage. To help begin to alleviate this gap in the research, a study using a mixed method having both qualitative and quantitative analyses was designed; short interviews were conducted with selected study participants. Anthropological methods have been cited as well suited for investigating college students because these methods provide “an insider’s perspective on what is happening in the group’s natural setting” (Stage, 1992, p.17).

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently. The concurrent transformative strategy was utilized to report the data. This approach is guided by the researcher’s use of a specific theoretical perspective (Creswell, 2003); in the case of this study the ecological framework. Using the concurrent transformative model data are collected at the same time during one data collection phase. The integration of these different data can occur in either the analysis or interpretation phase. With the current study data integration occurred in the interpretation/discussion phase. Reporting data in this method will aid in gaining perspective of an understudied research area. (Creswell, 2003).

Study Criteria

Quantitative Sample. Grade point average is a pertinent factor pertaining to graduate or professional school attendance (Poock, 2000); therefore, only African

American students with a G.P.A. of 2.75 were included in the study sample. Using a convenience sample of 128 students (N = 128) at two separate institutions of higher learning, a hybrid method involving both qualitative and quantitative methodologies was utilized to thoroughly explore the factors involved in African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school.

Qualitative Sample. Interviews were conducted at two separate settings: an HBCU and a PWI. Criteria for selection was based on whether or not the student had applied to graduate or professional school, therefore, hypothesizing that they are actively seeking enrollment in a graduate or professional school program in the near future. Six students who were planning to attend graduate or professional school were selected (three from each location), as well as six students who displayed no intentions on attending graduate or professional school (are not planning on continuing their education).

Institutional Setting

The Historically Black College (HBCU). The HBCU used in this study was founded in 1912 as a land grant institution. Total enrollment at this institution had reached 9,100 students as of Fall 2004. The 2004 enrollment included 8,852 undergraduate students and 1,844 graduate students. The HBCU is a major, comprehensive urban land-grant institution offering 43 bachelor's degrees and 26 master's degrees. Doctoral degrees are offered in six areas: biological sciences, psychology, public administration, curriculum and instruction, administration and supervision, and computer information systems engineering. Of the 8,852 undergraduate students attending the sampled HBCU, 606 fit the study criteria identified by the researcher.

Table 3

Number of Students at the HBCU Fitting the Research Criteria

Students Enrolled	Number
African American Enrollment	6928
African American Seniors	2720
African American Seniors with 2.75+ GPA	606

The Predominately White Institution (PWI). The PWI in this sample has been advancing knowledge and transforming lives through innovative teaching, research, and outreach for 150 years. The PWI was founded in 1855 as the nation's first land grant institution. Located in the Midwest, the university served as the prototype for 69 land grant institutions to be established under the Morrill Act of 1862. THE PWI offers more than 200 programs of study offered by 14 degree-granting colleges and an affiliated law college. In fall 2004, the PWI had an enrollment of 44,836 total: 35,408 undergraduate and 9,428 graduate and professional. Of the total enrollment at the PWI, 173 students fit the study criteria identified by the researcher.

Table 4

Number of Students at the PWI Fitting the Research Criteria

Students Enrolled	Number
Total African American Enrollment	3,332
African American Seniors	751
African American Seniors with 2.75+ GPA	330

Quantitative Recruitment

In order to obtain the required sample several recruitment strategies were implemented. Recruitment at each university was tailored to meet the specific research requirements established by the institution; as well as the different racial/ethnic make-up of each university.

Recruitment at the Historically Black University. Subjects at the HBCU were recruited through various channels; psychology research board, Honor's Program, upper level biology, and upper level psychology courses. In order to complete data collection on this campus, the researcher spent a week on the university's campus. Prior to arriving in the city, IRB approval had been obtained from the university. Additionally, the researcher had established contact with the Dean of Education, as well as, various professors on campus to ensure that their classrooms could be used as a participant recruitment site.

First, recruiting students from the psychology department research board. The researcher submitted a description of the study to the psychology department. The psychology department posted the study description as well as the time and location that interested students could complete the survey. The study information was posted on the research board located in the psychology department. The research board is the location where all research studies are posted for interested students. The study description, criteria for participation, and the time and location where the survey was to be administered were provided. All study participants that participate via the research board were eligible to receive extra credit for their participation.

Next, with regards to the Honor's Program. The researcher placed a flyer in the Honor's Program office. The flyer described the study and the date, time, and location

that interested participants could complete the survey. In addition, the researcher visited Honor’s Colloquium classes. Interested subjects that the researcher contacted via the classes had the opportunity to complete the survey after class, or they could complete the survey at the designated date and time.

Finally, with regards to subjects recruited via upper level psychology and biology courses. The researcher visited various classes and provided a brief description of the study. Interested students could sign up to complete the survey at the designated date and time or they could complete the survey after class.

Table 5

<i>Number of Students Obtained by Research Strategy</i>	
Recruitment Strategy	N
Psychology research board	0
University Honor’s Program	22
Classroom Presentations	54

Recruitment at the Predominantly White Institution. Due to the racial composition of the university, the primary researcher used various student organizations to capture the sample population. The primary researcher contacted the president of various organizations on campus that service a large African American undergraduate population. The university’s, Department of Student Life was utilized to generate a student organization contact list (Table 6). The primary researcher sent an email to various organization presidents describing the nature of the study and seeking permission

to attend a meeting (Appendix A). A total of eight student organizations were contacted; four responded to the primary researchers email (a response rate of 50%).

Table 6

Predominantly White University's Campus Organizations Contacted

Student Organization	Contact Made
Black Poets Society	Yes
National Association of Black Accountants	No
National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers	Yes
National Society of Black Engineers	Yes
Panhellenic Council	No
Professional African American Network	No
W.E.B. Dubois Society	Yes
Women of Color Task Force	No

In addition to contacting student organizations, the primary researcher used the snowball effect to identify additional campus organizations. The primary researcher contacted the Director of the McNair/SROP Program. The Director put the primary researcher in contact with several campus organization advisors (table 7). The primary researcher then sent an email to the organization's advisor describing the study and asking for permission to attend a meeting (See Appendix B). All advisors contacted responded (100% response rate). A date and time was then provided for the primary researcher to attend a meeting and make an oral presentation.

Table 7

Campus Organizations Contacted Using the Snowball Effect

Student Organization	Contact Made
Charles Drew Society	Yes
Black Student Alliance	Yes
African American Mentoring Program	Yes
Lane Scholars	Yes

The final recruitment strategy employed by the researcher was attending graduation activities during the African American Celebratory Week. The primary researcher was invited to attend graduation activities by the President of the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers; who was also serving as the chair of the Celebratory Week (table 8). The primary researcher used her discretion in deciding which activities to attend.

Table 8

Activities During the African American Celebratory Week

Activity	Attended
Maggie's Sports Grill	No
The Real World (What any graduate needs to know)	Yes
Movie Night	Yes
Kicking it at BW's	No
Pool Party	No

In all the various recruitment strategies employed by the primary researcher resulted in a sample size of 52 research participants (n = 52) (see table 9).

Table 9

Number of Participants Obtained by Each Recruitment Strategy

Recruitment Strategy	N
Black Poets Society	0
National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers	7
National Society of Black Engineers	7
Professional African American Network	0
W.E.B. Dubois Society	6
Charles Drew Society	7
Black Student Alliance	8
African American Mentoring Program	2
Lane Scholars	0
McNair/SROP	4
The Real World (What any graduate needs to know)	7
Movie Night	4

Qualitative Recruitment

Qualitative study participants were recruited via their study survey. At the end of the survey completed by students a page describing the qualitative portion of the study was included (See Appendix C). Students were asked if they were interested in participating; if they were interested they were to complete the information, tear the page

from the actual survey and hand it in separately to the primary researcher. All students surveyed agreed to participate in the follow-up interview. Students for the follow-up interview were randomly selected.

Demographic Characteristics of the Research Participants

Several demographic characteristics differentiate the present sample from other research samples that have focused on African Americans and graduate or professional school attendance. First, the present sample consisted of only African American seniors. Prior studies have not been student classification specific in their samples, and have combined students with differing classifications as one sample (Taylor, 2000). Second, the study focused solely on students with a competitive grade point average. Previous studies have not utilized subject grade point average as a study criterion (Taylor, 2000). The study consisted of two groups of participants; quantitative participants and qualitative participants.

Quantitative Sample

Table 10 contains demographic information pertaining to the 128 students in this study. Students in the study ranged in age from 21-41, with the mean age being 22 (SD = 2.65). Additionally, the majority of the sample was female, 70%. The majority of the participants were single (96%). In regard to family, a large percentage of the participants were from middle class families (45%). In addition, a large percentage of the participants' parents were married (39%).

Table 10

Demographic Information

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	39	31
Female	89	69
Age		
20	2	2
21	40	31
22	49	38
23	23	18
24	7	6
28	2	2
29	1	1
32	1	1
33	2	2
41	1	1
Current Marital Status		
Never Married	123	96
Married	5	4
Major		
Psychology	38	30
Industrial Technology	1	1
Education	3	2
Business	5	4
Rehabilitation/Allied Health	3	2
Biology/Chemistry/Math/Physics	19	15
Other	59	46
Parent's Marital Status		
Never Married	30	23
Married	50	39
Divorced	41	32
Widowed	7	6

Table 10 (continued)

Characteristics	N	%
Father's Education		
Grade School or Less	4	3
Some High School	8	6
Completed High School	31	24
Some College	32	25
Completed College	22	17
Graduate or professional School	20	16
Don't Know	11	9
Mother's Education		
Grade School or Less	2	2
Some High School	3	2
Completed High School	22	17
Some College	43	34
Completed College	31	24
Graduate or professional School	26	20
Don't Know	1	1
Economic Situation of Family Growing Up		
We Had Barely Enough to Get by	9	7
We Had Enough to Get by, But No More	38	30
We Were Solidly Middle-Class	57	45
We Had Plenty of "Extras"	18	14
We Had Plenty of "Luxuries"	6	5

Sample by Institution Type

The Historically Black University. There were a total of 103 students recruited from this university. Of these 27 surveys were not utilized because they were either incomplete or the student did not meet the study criteria. The total sample from this university was 76 ($n = 76$). Students from this university ranged in age from 20-41, with the mean age being 23 ($SD = 3.31$). Additionally, the majority of the sample was female ($n = 57$; 75%). The highest level of educational attainment achieved by the sample population parents was some college; father (29%) and mother (43%). A large percentage of the sample indicated that they were solidly middle class while growing up (47%). A large percentage of the sample indicated their parent's were married (40%); while the majority of the sample indicated they were currently single (never married) (92%), with no kids (85%).

Table 11

Demographic Information for Students at The HBCU

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	19	25
Female	57	75
Age		
20	2	2
21	20	26
22	31	41
23	10	13
24	6	8
28	2	3
29	1	1
32	1	1
33	2	3
41	1	1
Current Marital Status		
Never Married	70	93
Married	6	7
Major		
Psychology	33	43
Industrial Technology	3	4
Education	1	1
Business	1	1
Rehabilitation/Allied Health	13	17
Biology/Chemistry/Math/Physics	24	32
Other	1	1
Parent's Marital Status		
Never Married	18	24
Married	30	40
Divorced	24	32
Widowed	4	4

Table 11 (continued)

Characteristics	N	%
Father's Education		
Grade School or Less	3	4
Some High School	4	65
Completed High School	19	25
Some College	22	23
Completed College	13	17
Graduate or professional School	7	9
Don't Know	1	1
Mother's Education		
Grade School or Less	2	3
Some High School	1	1
Completed High School	13	17
Some College	33	43
Completed College	15	20
Graduate or professional School	11	15
Don't Know	1	1
Economic Situation of Family Growing Up		
We Had Barely Enough to Get by	4	5
We Had Enough to Get by, But No More	23	30
We Were Solidly Middle-Class	36	47
We Had Plenty of "Extras"	8	11
We Had Plenty of "Luxuries"	5	7
Don't Know	0	0

The Predominantly White Institution. There were a total of 52 students recruited from this university ($N = 52$). Students from this university ranged in age from 21-44, with the mean age being 22 ($SD = .85$). Additionally, the majority of the sample was female ($n = 32$; 62%). The highest level of educational attainment achieved by the sample population parent's was completion of graduate or professional school; father's (25%) and mother's (29%). The largest percentage of the sample indicated that they were solidly middle class while growing up (37%). A large percentage of the sample indicated their parent's were married (35%); while the majority of the sample indicated they were currently single (never married) (98%), with no kids (94%).

Table 12

Demographic Information for Students at the PWI

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	20	39
Female	32	61
Age		
21	20	39
22	18	35
23	13	25
24	1	2
Current Marital Status		
Never Married	52	100
Major		
Psychology	38	30
Industrial Technology	1	1
Education	3	2
Business	5	4
Rehabilitation/Allied Health	3	2
Biology/Chemistry/Math/Physics	19	15
Other	59	46
Parent's Marital Status		
Never Married	12	23
Married	18	35
Divorced	17	32
Widowed	5	10
Father's Education		
Grade School or Less	1	2
Some High School	4	8
Completed High School	12	23
Some College	10	19
Completed College	9	17
Graduate or professional School	2	4
Don't Know	1	2

Table 12 (continued)

Characteristics	N	%
Mother's Education		
Some High School	3	2
Completed High School	22	17
Some College	43	34
Completed College	31	24
Graduate or professional School	26	20
Don't Know	1	1
Economic Situation of Family Growing Up		
We Had Barely Enough to Get by	5	10
We Had Enough to Get by, But No More	15	29
We Were Solidly Middle-Class	19	37
We Had Plenty of "Extras"	8	15
We Had Plenty of "Luxuries"	3	6
Don't Know	2	4

Qualitative Sample

A total of 12 interviews ($N = 12$) were conducted. The total sample contained seven males ($n = 7$) and five females ($n = 5$). Ages of participants ranged from 21-24 ($M = 23$). For the total sample students' majors were: psychology ($n = 3$), education ($n = 4$), political science ($n = 2$), biology/chemistry ($n = 2$), and agriculture ($n = 1$).

Historically Black College Sample. A total of 6 interviews ($n = 6$) were conducted at the HBCU. This sample consisted of four males ($n = 4$) and two females ($n = 2$). Ages of participants ranged from 21-24 ($M = 23$). Within the sample students' majors were: psychology ($n = 2$), education ($n = 2$), political science ($n = 1$) and agriculture ($n = 1$).

Predominantly White Institution Sample. A total of 6 interviews ($n = 6$) were conducted at the HBCU. This sample consisted of three males ($n = 3$) and three females ($n = 3$). Ages of participants ranged from 21-23 ($M = 23$). Within the sample students' majors were: psychology ($n = 1$), education ($n = 2$), political science ($n = 1$) and biology/chemistry ($n = 2$).

Quantitative Measurements

Demographics. The survey contained twelve demographic items. These items were used to obtain the makeup of study participants. Items such as gender, age, marital status, family's socio-economic status and major were assessed for each study participant (See Appendix D for scale used).

Attitudes. Abstract and concrete attitudes about education were measured using a scale developed by Mickelson (1990). According to Mickelson, concrete attitudes about education reflect students' assessment of the role schooling in their own material reality

in which education may or may not bring opportunity. Abstract attitudes assess how they view education as a whole. The scale is a 5-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). For the original scale the alphas for each scale were: abstract scale $\alpha = .67$ and the concrete scale $\alpha = .71$.

The psychometric properties for these two subscales were different regarding the current study; specifically, regarding the concrete scale. The concrete scale had a $\alpha = .39$; the abstract scale had a $\alpha = .67$.

Table 13

Psychometric Properties of the Abstract Attitudes Subscale

Scale Items		Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1.	Education is a key to success in the future.	4.27	.99	.44
2.	If everyone in America gets a good education, we can end poverty.	2.52	1.02	.32
3.	Achievement and effort in school lead to job success later on.	4.06	.76	.53
4.	The way for poor people to become middle class is for them to get a good education.	3.30	.89	.26
5.	School success is not necessarily a clear path to better life. ®	2.45	.98	.26
6.	Getting a good education is a practical road to success for a young Black man/woman like me.	4.19	.68	.42
7.	Young Black women/men like me have a chance of making it if we do well in school.	4.11	.58	.37
8.	Education really pays off in the future for young Black men/women like me.	4.07	.68	.41
N = 128		Alpha = .67	Scale Mean = 28.97	Scale SD = 3.68

Table 14

Psychometric Properties of the Concrete Attitudes Subscale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. Based on their experiences, my parents say people like us are not always paid or promoted according to our education.	3.03	1.14	.07
2. All I need to learn for my future is to read, write, and make change.	1.96	1.11	.21
3. Although my parents tell me to get a good education in order to get a good job, they face barriers to job success.	3.63	1.06	.17
4. When our teachers give us homework, my friends never think of doing it.	2.23	1.03	.25
5. Studying in school rarely pays off later with good jobs.	1.94	.94	.33
N = 128 Alpha = .39 Scale Mean = 12.81 Scale SD = 2.87			

Because of the low Cronbach Alpha of the concrete subscale, the items in this subscale were dropped from any further analysis. When measuring students' attitudes towards education, only the abstract subscale was utilized.¹

¹ These items were retained and correlated as singlets with the outcome variable. There were no correlations between these five items and the outcome of planning to attend graduate or professional school.

Family involvement. The Perceived Parental Behavior Inventory (Mboya, 1993) was designed to measure three dimensions of students' perceptions of the behaviors of their parents. The measure examines factors within the family that provide support, encouragement, and stimulation for the development of the desirable educational outcomes. The multidimensional instrument has 23 items which reflect three dimensions, (a) the respondents' perceptions of parental support, interest and encouragement, (b) the respondents' perceptions of parental expectations, and (c) respondents' perceived participation by parents. For the purposes of this study only the dimensions of family support and parental expectation will be included. The participation dimension was not applicable to this population. The original dimensions had a coefficient $\alpha = .84$ and $.78$ respectively. All the statements are worded positively using a 5-point scale in Likert format, anchored by "I agree very much" and "I disagree very much".

Of the 23 items included on the original scale, 12 of these items were used for this study. The items within the family support and parental expectation subscale were combined to obtain one total sum score.

Table 15

Psychometric Properties of the Family Involvement Scale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. My family praises me for trying even if I do not succeed.	4.39	.92	.62
2. My family supports me in the things I do.	4.64	.50	.77
3. My family cares about my education.	4.69	.59	.79
4. My family encourages me to use my ideas.	4.56	.73	.81
5. My family encourages me to try my own ideas and be responsible for my actions.	4.59	.67	.75
6. My family makes me feel confident in my schoolwork.	4.43	.84	.76
7. My family is concerned about my future.	4.66	.62	.54
8. My family is satisfied with my academic achievement.	4.48	.77	.58
9. My family wants me to work hard at school.	4.64	.59	.84
10. My family thinks that it is important for me to continue my education.	4.49	.77	.64
11. When I graduate from undergraduate school, my family would want me to continue my education.	4.33	.90	.56
12. My family encourages me to do well in school.	4.67	.56	.80
N = 128 Alpha = .92 Scale Mean = 54.58 Scale SD = 6.36			

Peer Attitudes and Influence. The Peer Assessment scale (Purcell, Gable, and Caillard, 1994) was used to measure behavioral characteristics associated with high ability peers. The measure consists of 20 items on a 5-point Likert type scale, anchored by “not at all” and “a lot”. The scale had a $\alpha = .87$. Twelve of 20 items will be used in this study. Items were dropped that were not applicable to the research questions. Additionally, some items were altered for contextual purposes.

The items utilized in this study had a $\alpha = .88$.

Table 16

Psychometric Properties of the Peer Attitudes and Influence Scale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. Most of my close friends want to discuss topics in class that few students understand.	2.90	1.10	.43
2. Most of my close friends carry more courses than other students.	2.91	1.12	.52
3. Most of my close friends usually get good grades, even when others do poorly.	3.55	.97	.68
4. Most of my close friends feel confident they can achieve what they set out to do.	4.00	.83	.59
5. Most of my close friends seek out professors to talk with about ideas.	3.42	1.06	.62
6. Most of my close friends are involved with many school activities.	3.20	1.16	.49
7. Most of my close friends spend time and effort on homework and assignments.	3.68	.97	.66
8. Most of my close friends are going to graduate or professional school after graduation.	3.64	1.04	.69
9. Most of my close friends think education is important.	4.17	.85	.67
10. Most of my close friends participate in programs that will prepare them for graduate or professional school.	3.37	1.11	.63
11. Most of my close friends have discussed their future educational plans with me.	4.12	.94	.62
12. Most of my close friends think that I should continue my education.	4.10	.93	.45

N = 128

Alpha = .88

Scale Mean = 43.05

Scale SD = 8.01

Mentor Influence. Mentor influence and involvement will be measured using a scale developed by Dreher and Ash (1990). The scale developed by Dreher and Ash (1990) is a 19- item scale assessing both psychosocial (e.g., “conveyed feelings of respect for you as an individual”) and instrumental (e.g. “helped you improve your writing skills”) functions of a primary advisor. The scale was created to measure business school graduates’ mentoring experiences. The original scale had a coefficient $\alpha = .95$. Fourteen of the original items were retained; the five omitted items were irrelevant to undergraduate students. The scale is rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

The items utilized in this study had a $\alpha = .95$. Table 17 contains the psychometric properties and internal consistencies of the Mentor Influence Scale.

Table 17

Psychometric Properties of the Mentor Influence Scale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. Gone out of his/her way to promote your academic interests.	3.72	1.20	.80
2. Conveyed feelings of respect for you as an individual.	4.02	1.03	.94
3. Conveyed empathy for the concerns and feelings you have discussed with him/her.	3.91	1.07	.79
4. Encouraged you to talk openly about anxiety and fears that detract from your work.	3.56	1.20	.76
5. Shared personal experiences as an alternative perspective to your problems.	3.77	1.12	.80
6. Shared history of his/her career with you.	3.84	1.09	.80
7. Encouraged you to prepare for graduate or professional school.	3.95	1.14	.75
8. Served as a role model.	3.91	1.10	.78
9. Helped you finish assignments/tasks or meet deadlines that would have been otherwise difficult to complete.	3.42	1.25	.72
10. Helped improve your writing skills.	3.37	1.24	.64
11. Helped you with a presentation.	3.41	1.23	.71
12. Given you challenging assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills.	3.71	1.20	.64
13. Have provided guidance in making graduate or professional school plans.	3.80	1.04	.72
14. Would be disappointed if you do not attend graduate or professional school.	3.13	1.25	.55
15. Have assisted you in preparing your graduate	2.93	1.23	.52

or professional school application.

N = 128

Alpha = .95

Scale Mean = 54.45

Scale SD = 13.20

Perceived Academic Ability. The Pearlin Mastery Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), a widely used measure is employed to measure perceived academic ability. The scale contains 7 items that assess the extent to which the individual feels confident in their ability to control their life. In order to be applicable to this certain some content changes were made, but the scale's context remained the same. The scale is a 5-point likert ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The original scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Table 18

Psychometric Properties of the Perceived Academic Ability Scale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. If I try hard, I will get into graduate or professional school.	4.42	.64	.57
2. I think I can do the level of work required of me in graduate or professional school.	4.48	.61	.60
3. I think I would be able to accept the failure of not getting into a graduate or professional school program as long as I have tried my best. ®	2.80	1.29	.47
4. I will continue to try to get into graduate or professional school year after year by reapplying, retaking test, and making more contacts with different schools.	3.95	.93	.49
5. I believe I will get into graduate or professional school.	4.42	.69	.70
6. Having the same hard work effort I displayed in undergraduate will help me be successful in graduate or professional school.	4.16	.89	.41
N = 128	Alpha = .67	Mean = 24.24	SD = 3.24

Behavior. Actual behavior was measured by using 5 items (e.g. “I have sent quite a few applications to various graduate or professional schools programs”). The scale has been adapted from a previous measure (Ingram, Cope, Harju, & Wuensch, 2000). The scale is a 5-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Table 19

Psychometric Properties of the Actual Behavior Scale

Scale Items	Item Means	Item SD	Corrected Item - Total Correlations
1. I have sent quite a few applications /resumes to graduate or professional schools.	2.70	1.37	.70
2. I have already been accepted into a graduate or professional school program.	2.21	1.21	.76
3. I have completed the application process.	2.59	1.48	.83
4. I am currently waiting to hear from graduate or professional schools that I applied.	2.27	1.33	.63
5. I have already made my decision about what graduate or professional school I am attending next year.	2.73	1.41	.43
N = 128	Alpha = .85	Mean = 12.49	SD = 5.39

Qualitative Measures

Using a structured interview protocol, the researcher, facilitated discussions among participants centering on factors that influenced their decision to attend (or not to attend) graduate or professional school. The interview protocol was developed based on the themes guiding the research questions in the study (See Appendix E). The individual interviews lasted between 20-30 minutes. The interview protocol was the same for all individuals interviewed. Changes were made only where syntax was inappropriate.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Examining the Proposed Research Questions

Broadly using the micro and macro systems of the ecological framework, this study attempted to answer the following five research questions: 1) What is the role that environment (institution type) plays on the decision to apply to graduate or professional school by African American students? 2) What is the role of major socialization agents-family, mentors, peers-in contributing to African American students decision to apply to graduate or professional school. 3) Do African American students' attitudes towards education affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school? 4) Do African American students' perceptions of their academic ability affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school? 5) What is the role of all of these factors-socialization agents, attitudes toward education, and academic ability- in the decision of African American students to attend graduate or professional school? and 6) How do African American students construe the decision to attend graduate or professional school? In order to answer these questions, frequency distributions, several regression analyses (logistic), and thematic coding of qualitative data was conducted. To check for normal distribution of the data, frequencies, means, and standard deviations for all demographic and survey data were performed.

Research Question 1

The first research question examined the role that environment (institution type) plays in African American students decision to apply to graduate or professional school by African American students. In order to examine this research question a frequency

distribution was conducted to determine the number of African American students attending the number students attending the HBCU versus the number of African American students attending the PWI planning to attend graduate or professional school.

The frequency distribution indicated that the majority of the HBCU students included in the sample had plans to attend graduate or professional school in the fall ($n = 63$; 83%); the same is true for the majority of the PWI students included in the sample ($n = 35$; 67%). To determine if there was a difference in the role that institution type plays on the decision to attend graduate or professional school an independent-sample t test was conducted with students planning to attend graduate or professional school. The results for students planning to attend graduate or professional school during the next academic year were significant $t(126) = 2.06, p < .05, w^2 = .02$. Students from the HBCU ($M = .83, SD = .38$) on average had greater plans of attending graduate or professional school than those students attending the PWI ($M = .67, SD = .47$) (Table 20).

Table 20

Independent Sample T-Tests of Attendance and Institutional Setting

Institution	Yes	No	Mean
PWI	35	17	.67
HBCU	63	13	.83

Research Questions 2

The next research question examined what is the role of major socialization agents-family, mentors, and peers-in contributing to the decision of African American students to apply to graduate or professional school? To answer this question logistic

regression analysis was conducted. Logistic regression² was conducted to determine if any of these socialization agents bear any weight in the decisions of African American students to attend graduate or professional school, and if so, which was the most significant variable. The Backward: LR s model for logistic regression was utilized; using this method the equation is built with all variables and then removes them one by one if they do not contribute to the logistic regression. In all this regression included three blocks. The first block included mentor, friend, and family. The first block indicated that peer/friend influence ($W = .83$; $OR = 1.34$) and family involvement ($W = 3.38$; $OR = 2.03$) are more significant in influencing African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school. Block two indicated that family involvement ($W = 3.36$; $OR = 1.98$) is more significant than peer/friend influence in influencing African American students' decision to attend or professional school. The final block (block 3) indicated that when considered separately, family involvement ($W = 3.72$; $OR = 2.05$) is the most significant socialization agent in influencing African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school attendance (see Table 21). The final block (family variable) can predict students' plans to attend graduate or professional school 70% of the time (the cut value is .50).

² Before the logistic regression was conducted correlation analysis was conducted on all of the covariates used in the study. None of the variables were highly correlated; therefore, multicollinearity is not an issue.

Table 21

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Socialization Agents (N = 128)

Variable	Odds Ratio	SE	Wald Statistic
Step 1			
Mentor	.93	.25	.08
Friend	1.34	.32	.83
Family	2.03	.39	3.38
Step 2			
Friend	1.32	.32	.76
Family	1.98	.37	3.36
Step 3			
Family	2.05	.37	3.72*

Note: $p < .05$

Research Question 3

The next research question examined whether African American students' attitudes toward education affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school? To answer this question a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The ANOVA was significant, $F(1, 126) = 4.27, p < .05, w^2 = .02$. A significant difference exists on how students planning to attend graduate or professional school view education as compared to those students with no plans to attend graduate or professional school.

Table 22

Summarizing the Results of Attendance and Attitudes in an ANOVA Source Table

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	.668	1	.668	4.269
Within Groups	19.726	126	.157	
Total	20.394	127		

Research Question 4

The next research question examined whether African American students' perceptions of their academic ability affect their decision to apply to graduate or professional school. To answer this question a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The ANOVA was significant, $F(1, 126) = 17.74, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$. A significant difference exists on how students planning to attend graduate or professional school view their academic ability as compared to those students with no plans to attend graduate or professional school (Table 23).

Table 23

Summarizing the Results of Attendance and Academic ability in an ANOVA Source Table

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	4.132	1	4.132	17.742
Within Groups	29.345	126	.233	
Total	33.477	127		

Research Question 5

The next research question examined what contribution all of these factors- socialization agents, attitudes toward education, and academic ability- in the decision of African American students' to attend graduate or professional school. To answer this question a logistic regression analysis was conducted.

Logistic regression was conducted to determine which of these factors bear any weight in the decisions of African American students to attend graduate or professional school, and if so, which are the most significant variable. In all this regression included five blocks. The first block included attitudes about education, perceived academic

ability, mentor involvement, peer/friend influence and family involvement. Block one indicated that peer/friend involvement was the most insignificant variable ($W = .10$; $OR = 1.13$) therefore this variable was dropped. In block two, family involvement had the lowest weight ($W = .11$; $OR = 1.16$); consequently, this variable was dropped. Block three indicated that mentor involvement was the most insignificant variable ($W = .17$; $OR = .89$). Block four indicated that attitudes toward education ($W = .92$; $OR = 1.74$), was less significant than the student's perceived academic ability ($W = 11.11$; $OR = 5.64$). The final block (block 5) indicated that the student's perceived academic ability ($W = 13.24$; $OR = 6.21$) is the most significant factor influencing African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school attendance (see Table 24). The final block (perceived academic ability) can predict a student's plans to attend graduate school 78% of the time.

Table 24

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis- All Factors Included (N = 128)

Variable	Odds Ratio	SE	Wald Statistic
Step 1			
Attitude	1.71	.60	.79
Self ³	5.3	.55	9.2
Mentor	.85	.30	.27
Friend	1.13	.39	.10
Family	1.15	.45	.10
Step 2			
Attitude	1.79	.59	.99
Self	5.32	.55	9.35
Mentor	.87	.30	.23
Family	1.16	.45	.11
Step 3			
Attitude	1.81	.58	1.04
Self	5.64	.52	11.11

³ The variable labeled Self is the Perceived Academic Ability variable included in the study.

Mentor	.89	.29	.17
Step 4			
Attitude	1.74	.57	.92
Self	5.45	.51	11.10
Step 5			
Self	6.12	.50	13.24***

Note: $p < .001$

Research Question 6

The final research question examined how African American students' construe the decision to attend graduate or professional school. This question was answered by conducting structured interviews with research participants. The interview guide included questions based on certain themes the primary researcher was interested in exploring: family involvement with student's education, peer attitude/influence about education, mentor influence/involvement in student's educational processes, and perceived academic ability of the student. The explored themes were developed using the ecology theory guiding the study. After the interviews were transcribed, the primary researcher examined and coded the data using the preset themes/categories (socialization agents, attitudes toward education, and perceived academic ability) (Glaser, 1992) (Table 25). In order to ensure accuracy of the coding, after the primary researcher coded the data, a separate researcher (trained in qualitative research methods) coded the data separately. The pertinent themes that emerged from the dataset were then discussed. In addition, to exploring the data for pertinent themes, the data were examined for relevant patterns across the dataset (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 25

Codes Used to Categorize Data

Category	Sub-Category
Family Involvement/Influence	Family educated Assisted with homework Assisted with applications Emphasis on education
Peer Attitude/Influence	Education is important Helped with schoolwork Going to graduate or professional school +/- view of education Friends supportive
Mentor Influence/Involvement	Talked about continuing education Application assistance Letter of Reference
Perceived Academic Ability	+ view of graduate/professional school Graduate or professional school is hard Faith in ability
Attitude Towards Education	+/- view of education Love for education Education as important/unimportant

Summarizing Themes in the Qualitative Data

Family Involvement. The theme of family involvement is made up of various factors. Primarily this theme entails the emphasis that the family placed on education, whether or not education was important in the home and if there was an expectation for the student to excel academically. Also, this theme was concerned with assessing whether the family had an influence (i.e. offered support, expressed the importance of a graduate education) in the student's decision to attend (or not to attend) graduate or

professional school and if this support impacted the student's educational aspirations and decisions.

Data indicated that emphasis on education in the household during the formative years is important even if the student does not plan on continuing their education past their undergraduate degree. Parents appeared determined to help their children succeed academically. This desire was manifested in high expectations and a constant engagement in various facets of the student's education. This included an overarching emphasis on the importance of education, a steady focus on high levels of performance, engagement with teachers and school activities, and providing assistance with homework. Two quotes the first from a student with plans to attend graduate school for education in the Fall and the second from a student with no plans to continue their education, illustrate several of these themes:

One student planning to attend graduate school for education in the Fall stated:

"...I was actually brought up if I didn't do what I needed to do in the classroom I was not going to be able to plan in the field, I love sports so my parents used that as a leverage to you know keep me doing good in school..."

Another student with no immediate plans to continue their education also expressed education as an important factor during their early childhood development.

This student stated:

"Like my mom, she really, really focused on good grades. And she made sure we did our work; there was no such thing as not doing your work, not going to school. When I was younger I always used to never miss school..."

Even though both sets of students said education was important during the formative years, those students with plans to continue past college stated that their

parents'/families emphasized the importance of a graduate education and would be disappointed if they did not continue. One student with plans to attend law school stated:

"Both of parents emphasized that I should be getting good grades and go further than college. They had/have high expectations for me and they say that, my father told me he's smart and my mom is smart, so I should be smart."

The opposite is true for those students with no plans to continue their education. The majority of students with no plans to continue their education indicated that their family supported this decision and felt it was time they joined the workforce. For example one student not continuing their education stated:

"My mom thought I should go to work right away, anyway."

The majority of students planning to continue their education stated their parents'/family had an impact on their educational aspirations. These students credited their parents'/family as being influential factors in instilling the desire to want to achieve. A quote from a student with plans to attend graduate school in education illustrates this point:

"The pressure my parents placed on me, well I wouldn't call it pressure, I was exposed to education at an early age and it just helped me to set high goals for myself. It helped me to want more and to realize this is what you need to be able to live certain lifestyles."

For those students planning to continue their education, family support towards educational endeavors exists even if the family does not have a clear understanding of exactly what those educational aspirations are. For those students in the sample going into the research field they indicated that at times, their family was a little confused about what they were doing, but none the less they provided their support. These students viewed their family as providing nurturance, support, guidance, and understanding. One student with plans to attend graduate school for education stated:

“oh well lots of them probably don't even know what I was going to graduate school, or don't really know what graduate school is. It's basically like its not law or medical school; those are heard of. So I told them about it and discussed what I want to do, so they are like “o.k. that's great”.

Peer Attitude/Influence. The theme of peer attitude/influence examined the role that peers contribute in the educational aspirations of African American students. This theme examined if having peers with similar attitudes towards education and educational aspirations was significant when making the decision to attend graduate or professional school.

Regarding educational attitudes, all students indicated their peers' view education as important, regardless of whether their friends have plans to continue their education.

One student with plans to attend graduate school for counseling psychology stated:

“All of my friends are here and are studying to graduate. It's not like anybody is slacking. I might have studied a bit harder and I have plans to go a bit further than somebody else, but that's not say that they don't care about their education though.”

Another student with no plans on continuing their education, had this to say about their peers' educational attitude:

“I'd say they think education is very important. Everybody around me was intent on getting their degree. To a certain aspect a lot of them were into it.”

Even though the majority of the sample indicated their peers' view education as important, only those students continuing their education have peers who are also going on to graduate or professional school.

According to those students with plans to continue their education, having peers with similar educational aspirations serves as helpful motivation regarding schoolwork and the application process. One student with plans to attend law school stated:

"Well it's a lot easier to study when you have people around you that are studying. For instance, my best friend in addition to going to parties and hanging out and doing other stuff that young people do, we go to the library together. And I think the measure of how good your friends are in undergrad is if you all go to the library together".

Even though those students with plans to continue their education emphasized the importance of having peers to offer motivational support regarding schoolwork, they indicated that their peers did not have an impact regarding their educational aspirations.

One student with plans to go to graduate school for agriculture stated:

"Your friends don't matter if you have set in your mind that you're gonna do something and you know that's what you are gonna do. You don't need anyone to tell you do it you are gonna do it yourself and I personally even if I didn't have the friends that were there to push me and tell me you know what I'm saying or we all weren't close knit to know we were going on to graduate school I know myself. I know that I want better so in order to get better I would have to go further with my education, so that's what I proceeded to do."

Mentor Influence/Involvement. The theme mentor influence/involvement examined whether having an active mentor involved in the students' life assisted with the students' educational aspirations. It appears that having a mentor is important regarding having someone to discuss plans with, after the decision to continue their education has already been made. In essence, it appears that a mentor provides assistance, but is not an influential factor. For example, the majority of students indicated that having someone to discuss plans and write recommendations made the process easier. One student with plans to attend law school stated:

"My mentors were very helpful. I had a lot of people I consulted in regards to my law school application process. Specifically with my personal statement, because I was having them read it. They also wrote my letters of recommendation."

Not all students planning to continue their education had mentors to discuss plans. However, the comments by these students mirrored those of the students with mentors.

Like their counterparts, these students indicated that having a mentor would have been useful to discuss plans and assist with the application process. One student with plans to attend graduate school in psychology stated:

"I would say I had some good teachers, but not a mentor. I would say it's really hard to gain sort of a relationship with professors or faculty members because it's such a large class and it's really, that direct interaction is not there. It was kind of hard when I was applying for grad school and I had to come up with letters of recommendation. It would have been nice if I was asking someone I had worked with a long time, rather than someone I just got a good grade from. So it's kind of hard in that kind of relationship."

Perceived Academic Ability. This theme examined whether African American students' perception of their academic ability affected their decision to continue their education. Those students with plans to continue their education demonstrated faith in their ability to excel academically in graduate or professional school. These students felt they have the work ethics and skills needed to matriculate successfully in their chosen field of study. For example one student with plans to attend graduate school in education stated:

"I went thru life, and hard living I have learned discipline, and time management and that is very essential in higher education."

Because of their strong work ethic, those students with plans to attend graduate or professional school did not feel that race will play in role in the treatment they receive at their perspective institutions. These students believe that the higher level of educational specialization offered in graduate or professional school will offer them the opportunity to be judged by their work and not by their race. These students feel that because they have been accepted into the graduate or professional school of their choice, they have already proven themselves as more than just another Black face. A quote from a student with plans to go to graduate school for education illustrates this point:

"I know for myself and other African Americans about affirmative action, and not being able to achieve or do as good as other students. But I believe in grad school it will not be really important. It's not really a topic of discussion as far as things come up. Your performance will speak for you."

Even those students with no plans to continue their education feel that they have the ability to do well in graduate or professional school. For example, when asked how they thought they would do if they were going to continue their education, one student with no plans to continue their education stated:

"I would push myself. I would make sure I would do o.k. I'm really not going to fear anything. I can do anything I put my mind to."

Emerging Patterns in the Qualitative Data

After the data had been grouped into the various themes, the data were examined for emerging patterns. Initially, the primary researcher assumed that patterns in the data would manifest based on the institution the student attended and the student's gender. However, no patterns emerged based on institutional setting or gender. The patterns that emerged were based on whether or not the student had plans to continue their education. All students interviewed indicated that they were pleased with the resources offered and the education they received at their home institution. Additionally, students indicated they felt like a part of the community at their institution. Even though patterns did not emerge based on institutional setting, there were two main patterns that emerged from the data: community obligation and educational attitudes. Each of these patterns will be discussed in the following sections.

Community Obligation. The next pattern that emerged was the sense of obligation to the African American community expressed by those students going to graduate or professional school. Those students with plans to attend graduate or

professional school expressed their desire to use their degree not only to better themselves, but also to advance their community. One student with plans to attend graduate school in agriculture stated:

“Okay you look at education and you look at Black people we are already set at a low standard, so when it comes to educational value you know a lot of us just meant to finish high school, so that is all we do, they finish high school. That’s good but I feel that by showing that I can do more than finish high school it’s showing the other race; you know what I am saying? That okay, well they can do more than just finish high school or run fast or catch a ball or jump high you know. It proves that we can do more than that. In a short time span we have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go, but I feel by this generation doing what we’re doing now you know, umm, it sets the standard for the upcoming generation to not just finish college but to finish college and to go on to finish grad school obtain that Ph.D. So to me being an African American and my going to grad school go hand in hand. ”

Attitudes Towards Education. All students represented (to a certain extent) view education as an important vehicle for helping them reach their life goals. Even though all students interviewed feel education is important, there were different attitudes towards education and how school can help with future advancement. The students with plans to attend graduate or professional school immediately expressed a love for education. One student with plans to attend medical school stated:

“I have always loved school, like throughout so it never bothered me studying and stuff like that. ”

Additionally, these students see education as a means to help them better their status in life as well as their personal development. One student with plans to attend graduate school stated:

“Initially I thought I wanted to go to medical school, but I had a revelation that the best walk for me and my community, my community would be better served if I went into education. With all the new things happening like the No Child Left Behind initiative and affirmative action, and stuff like that. I think, um, a big big problem is that younger people are not being exposed to college and stuff like that. If we want a better future outcome for our youth, than education is key.”

On the other-hand, those students with no plans to attend graduate or professional school indicated they are tired of school and in need of a break. One student stated:

"I have been in school forever honestly, I need a break, I know I'm not ready to go straight to grad school."

Additionally, students with no plans to attend graduate or professional school feel education is important (indicated by their completed undergraduate school) but they differ on how much education they feel is needed. For example, one student with no plans to attend graduate or professional school stated:

"I view graduate school as overrated. I felt that if you have a strong work ethic and other essential qualities about yourself, that you don't necessarily need a master's degree to move yourself up in the corporate world, or in whatever field you decide to go into."

Chapter V

Discussion

Many researchers have done a disservice to African American students by failing to investigate the influences that limit the negative consequences on academic achievement (Foster, 1997; vein Rutter, 1979). Recent research has indicated that determined students can succeed academically regardless of minority status, coming from single-parent families, and low socioeconomic status (Huang & Waxman, 1996). Rather than concentrate on deficient models and African Americans' who are doomed to failure in the United States' educational system, the positive factors that lead to success such as parental nurturing, mentoring relationships, strong peer relations, educational attitudes, and perceived academic ability should be examined. To aid in this effort, this research study examined the factors that influenced academically achieving African American students' decisions to continue their education past the undergraduate degree. African American students who are excelling academically may provide the most valuable insights toward improving the education of other African American students who have not fared so well in educational systems that have served them poorly.

This chapter summarizes the results of the study and discusses the findings as they relate to the research questions. Since the study design used mixed methods, where appropriate, the discussion of the research questions will integrate the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative items. Next, the results of this study are explored in relationship to prior research. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings for future professional practice and research. Limitations to the study are also identified. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of why increasing the

attendance of African American students in graduate and professional programs is important.

Discussion of the Results

Broadly using the ecological theory, this study was guided by several research questions. The first question examined the role that environment (institution type) plays on the decision to apply to graduate or professional school by African American students. In order to answer this question both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses did not converge completely. The frequency distribution indicated that the majority of HBCU students and PWI students included in the sample had plans to attend graduate or professional school in the fall. Additionally, students from the HBCU had on average greater plans of attending graduate or professional school than those students attending the PWI. These findings are in line with previous research indicating that African American students attending historically Black colleges are more likely to act on educational aspirations (Allen, 1992; Heath, 1992). However, the qualitative data presented information different than what was expected. When examining the qualitative data there were no themes or patterns that across institutional settings. Students from both institutions expressed being happy with the education received at their chosen institution. Overall, students indicated they felt their institution had enough resources available for African American students. In addition, students across institutional settings felt they were included as an intricate part of the student body. For the students attending the PWI, they did not feel that their race/culture excluded them. Additionally, none of the students

interviewed indicated that their institution had an impact on their decision to continue their education.

These results counter what is typically reported regarding graduate education and African American students. Typically, studies of African American students' experiences at HBCUs and PWIs suggest that many have negative experiences at PWIs and that they suffer lower achievement (Allen, 1992; Cole & Barber, 2003; Nettles, 1988; Treisman, 1992). In contrast, other studies suggest that African American students who attend HBCUs experience higher intellectual gains and have a more favorable psychosocial adjustment and a more positive self-image (Allen, 1992). Fleming (1982, 1984) and Allen (1992) found that African American students attending HBCUs received more academic and social support services than their peers attending PWIs. Allen (1987) contrasted services and benefits of HBCUs and PWIs, finding that Black students attending HBCUs attain cultural connectedness, have a greater sense of well-being, and were provided additional and more diverse academic and program options.

There are several implications based from these results. The data indicated that there is a significant difference in the number of students from the HBCU versus those from the PWI with plans to continue their education, however, students do not perceive a difference in the type of education and support they receive based on institution type. Even though there is a significant difference in graduate or professional school attendance based on institutional setting (HBCU vs. PWI) the institutional setting itself may not be why the difference in educational aspirations exists. The decision to attend graduate or professional school may be influenced by other factors. Research findings indicate that there is typically a different type of student that chooses to attend an HBCU

(Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Typically, students who attend HBCUs have a connection with an individual who has attended an HBCU (family, teacher, or friend) and come from educated families where education is strongly emphasized (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). This suggests that students attending an HBCU may have a higher disposition for continuing their education prior to starting undergraduate school.

As a result of these findings caution should be applied when assuming that PWIs provide inferior environments for students' educational achievement. Students attending HBCUs, just like students attending PWIs have to be studied by the type of HBCU they select (Allen, 1992). There are differences in the selectivity of the colleges and the students attending different types of HBCUs (i.e. private and public) (Freeman, 1998). Therefore, caution should be used in making general statements about the background characteristics of all students attending different types of institutions; additional factors should be examined before researchers draw conclusions based solely on institutional setting.

The next research question examined the role of major socialization agents—family, mentors, and peers—in contributing to the decision of African American students to apply to graduate or professional school. In this instance, results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses did agree. However, they presented somewhat unexpected findings. Much of the research on African American families and achievement paints a picture of under-achievement as a function of socio-demographic variables (Ford, 1993). A large percentage of the students sampled were from middle class families, where a large percentage of their parents had only completed some college. Based on previous research, these demographic variables themselves would be enough to indicate that the

family involvement/influence factor would not be as significant as other factors. For example, the literature cites that parental social class is predictive of children's outcomes (Kohn, 1969) and home environments engendered by more educated and occupationally skilled parents are more supportive and encouraging of their child (Mau, 1995; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Additionally, studies have indicated that, past adolescence, peers are the most influential source in African American students' lives (Seyfried & Chung, 2002). According to Ogbu (1988), the influential role of peers is the primary reason that the majority of African American students underachieve. Ogbu (1988) contended that African American students' peers consider achieving as "acting White"; as a result, students who could possibly be high achieving reject education. However, despite the fact that a large percentage of the samples' parents had only completed some college and that studies indicate that peer influence is the most significant beyond adolescence, the results of the data indicated that family influence/involvement is the most significant socialization agent regarding African American students' decision to attend graduate or professional school.

The results of this study indicated that for those students planning to continue their education peer support and mentor involvement are important for discussing future plans, but that family is the socialization agent responsible for the students' desire to want to achieve and continue with their education. Additionally, the students in the study with plans to continue their education indicated that education past the undergraduate degree was emphasized within the home, whereas those students with no plans of continuing their education indicated that the importance of a college education was emphasized within the home, but education beyond college was not emphasized.

As these findings suggest, African American students are definitely achievement oriented and at the center of the African American student's quest for educational advancement is the African American family. Generally, African American parents strive to teach their children to compete with dominant cultures and to help them find ways to advance themselves in the face of difficult barriers (Freeman, 1999). The strong emphasis that has been placed on the role of SES, educational level, income, family composition, and other demographic variables in the achievement of African American students must now be placed in combination with family achievement orientation, thereby giving greater emphasis to the latter variable (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Based on these results, it appears in understanding African American students educational participation, one would need to understand the ways in which their families impart values concerning continued education past college.

The next research question examined whether African American students' attitude toward education affects their decision to apply to graduate or professional school. There was a significant difference in the way students planning to attend graduate or professional school viewed education. Those students with plans to attend graduate or professional school viewed continued schooling as a vehicle for success and upward mobility. These students displayed a positive attitude and overall love towards the educational process. On the other hand, those students not planning to continue their education indicated they are tired of school and in need of a break. Additionally, students not planning to continue their education were skeptical as to how important they feel a graduate education is. These students indicated that a college education was fine, but anything beyond, was typically unnecessary (they could receive any additional training

from their jobs). These findings are consistent with previous research (Mickelson, 1990; Heath, 1992; Poock, 2000). If students do not recognize the importance of education in their life, they are less likely to work towards achieving higher educational goals (Mickelson, 1990).

Next, this study examined whether African American students perception of their academic ability was related to their decision to apply to graduate or professional school. There was a significant difference in how those students planning to attend graduate or professional school perceives their academic ability. For those students planning to continue their education, they felt they had the study skills, motivation and desire necessary to be successful in graduate or professional school. On the other hand, those students with no plans to continue their education felt they would do well, but they indicated they sometimes procrastinated or lacked the focus or motivation needed to complete tasks. Lack of motivation and focus was further emphasized in these students' future plans. None of the students not continuing their education had plans beyond graduation; they had not even begun job searching.

These results are in line with previous research (Blash & Unger, 1995; Ellison, 1993; Mizell, 1999; Pearlin, Lieberman, & Menaghan, 1981) that indicated that a students' sense of control over their education (self efficacy) has positive implications for educational attainment. There is a robust link between the amounts of education a student desires and the amount of education actually attained (Hanson, 1994). High educational attainment, in turn, provides entrée to opportunity and a greater sense of control over one's environment (Broman, 1995).

The next research question examined what contribution all of these factors—

socialization agents, attitudes toward education, and perceived academic ability— play in African Americans students' decision to attend graduate or professional school. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data converged. The results indicated that when taken together the most significant predictor of a students' decision to continue their education is the students' perceived academic ability. These results are in line with previous work in this area indicating that perceived academic ability is related to academic expectations, performance and aspirations (Jackson, 2002). High academic ability beliefs help to determine a person's choice of behaviors, activities, effort, quality of performance and persistence when confronted with obstacles (Lent, Brown, Gore, 1997). In this regard, it is practical that a student, who has a high degree of belief in their academic ability, would also strive to continue their education by entering graduate or professional school.

The final research question examined how African American students construed the decision to attend graduate or professional school. Only qualitative analyses were used to answer this question. Students' with plans to continue their education indicated their commitment to themselves (faith in their academic ability) was the primary motivational force behind their achievement. Additionally, these students indicated that their commitment to their community (African American community) was a motivational factor. These students indicated that their families were responsible for laying the initial foundation of valuing education. Students indicated that they used this foundation to shape their educational goals. Additionally, these students indicated that while they were growing up, the importance of education beyond college was emphasized within the home.

An unexpected theme which emerged was the fact that students with plans to continue their education did not perceive race to be an impeding factor (regardless of institutional setting). This fact could possibly correlate directly with the students' high perception of their academic ability. High efficacious students view the educational experience more as a challenge than a threat (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). Higher levels of efficacy help students deal with stressful situations, which help them adjust to educational challenges. Fordham (1996) describes the high-achieving students as tending to "minimize the impact of race and gender-related obstacles" (p. 329). Additionally, Fordham stated, "high-achieving students...believe that if they are able to demonstrate that African American students can perform in ways that are comparable to those of their White counterparts, they will...obtain the same opportunities and rewards as their White cohorts" (p. 328). According to Fordham (1996) the high-achieving African American student seems to believe that the United States is a meritocracy and that they will not let themselves be constrained by society. Additionally, Fordham states, that high-achieving students have begun to think of themselves as future members of the elite and have the conviction that they may become members of the successful middle class in the future. As indicated by students faith in their academic ability, perhaps a reason why some African American college attendees have high aspirations is because of this sense of optimism about the future and a strong belief that society and the educational system will reward them for their hard work, thus in turn not only will they benefit but their community will benefit as well.

Implications for future practice and research

To date there have been few studies examining the educational processes of African American students past college (Birkett & Kiel, 1995; Gray, 1978). To help compensate for this gap in the literature, broadly using the ecological framework, an exploratory study examining a myriad of factors was conducted. The current study sought not only to identify influential factors, but also to understand how students make their educational decisions. Based on the results of this study the perceived academic ability of the student is the primary reason students' seek to continue their education past an undergraduate education. Additionally, the results of this study indicate that the micro system most responsible for these students' perceived academic ability is the family; students continuing their education, indicate that their family is responsible for instilling in them the importance of continuing their education past college. Based on these facts it is assumed that the decision to attend graduate or professional school is decided before the student enters college. Students enter the university with rather well defined self-perceptions of their academic preparation, personal and social needs and career aspirations. These perceptions represent the total experiences the student has had, both positive and negative, and are the basis for the students' future experiences both positive and negative (Rowser, 1997).

Once in college these high achieving students seek training programs, mentors, peers class-work, etc., to assist in making their dream a reality. Interactions with faculty and staff on campus help students maneuver through the institutional bureaucracy and aid students' goal development. Designing programs and interactions with faculty so that African American students have access to information about their educational options is

important for students when planning or considering a graduate education. Particular kinds of programs that would serve this purpose are undergraduate research training programs where students are able to receive academic credit and research experience working with faculty members. Students who work closely with faculty are in better positions to receive advice from faculty members for pursuing advanced degrees. Also, the organization/development of structured peer study groups can assist students academically by pairing them with students who have similar goals and interests. The federal government provides funding for many such programs geared at providing students of color training for graduate and professional school (i.e. MARC and McNair/SROP). However, recent federal budget cuts have started to decrease the presence of many of these programs on university and college campuses nationwide. Based on the results of this study, it is indicated that these programs are needed to provide resources such as mentors and research training for those students with high educational aspirations. The rigorous research training and mentoring offered by these programs can serve as a resource for students planning to continue their education, thereby helping them work towards achieving their educational goals.

Additionally, the results of this study indicated that new types of graduate study preparation programs should be implemented. These programs should be geared towards students during pre-college years. This programming implication is based on two findings within this study. As stated earlier, the decision to seek a graduate education may be determined prior to entering college. As a result, once in college many students may develop a desire to seek a graduate education, but they may lack an understanding of how to make this desire a reality. If students receive information about graduate studies prior

to college they may be more equipped to make decisions regarding their future. Additionally, it is indicated that the family unit is the most important micro-system (socialization agent) regarding students' educational attainment. For example, those students planning to continue their education past college, indicated that there was a strong push by their family to do so, on the other-hand for those students with no plans to continue past undergraduate, indicated that there was no pressure by family members for them to continue. Unfortunately, within many African American families, there are few if any family members who have sought education post-college; therefore, in some instances family members may not readily understand what a graduate or professional school education entails. Based on these realities, federal funding should be geared towards establishing programs that will educate pre-college students and their families regarding the importance of a graduate or professional school education, thus in turn families can influence students' to continue their education past undergraduate school. If African American families understand that a graduate education is becoming a necessity for upward mobility they may influence their children to strive towards this goal.

Limitations and future studies

Few studies have examined the factors, which influence African American students' decision to attend graduate or professional school. As a result this study was exploratory in both scope and design. Based on the exploratory design of the study there are several limitations that future studies can build upon.

There are many studies regarding the high aspirations of African American students, yet there are no studies that examine how to turn these aspirations into reality (Allen, 1992; Deskins, 1994; Heath, 1992). Additionally, no studies have examined if

these aspirations are ever attained. Within the current study there were a large number of students indicating they had plans to continue their education, however, no evidence is provided regarding if these plans came to fruition. A future study should collect follow-up information from students examining the actual behavior of entering and completing a graduate or professional school education. This data could be used to analyze the similar characteristics of those students who turn their aspirations into reality.

Another limitation is the study population. All the student data collected at the PWI came from student organizations developed to service the African American student body. Therefore, all the study data from the PWI came from students who were involved within the student population. This factor could influence why students from the PWI felt included and involved at their institution. A future study should involve a more diverse sample at the PWI. The sample should reach students, in the dorm, classrooms etc. in order to obtain a sample of students who may not be actively involved in student organizations, thus providing a more representative sample.

Even though the current study utilized institutions that were alike in many instances; public institution, majority of the students were in-state, and the schools had similar ACT scores for student admission, the institution size and geographical location of the schools can not be ignored. The current study used a convenience sample of institutions, and sample sizes were uneven- with the sample of African American students from the HBCU being larger than the student sample from the PWI. A future study could use separate institutions that are similar in study body, but also on demographic makeup and geographical location.

Additionally, new studies need to be done examining institutional setting, the current study indicates that differences may not be as significant as previous research has entailed. Previous research indicates that the institutional settings (environment) are significant contributors to educational attainment, self esteem, aspirations, and identity for African American students (Allen, 1992; Astin, 1977; Astin & Cross, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). These studies were typically conducted prior to the year 2000. Based on the findings of this study, environment is important, but not the way that it has been measured. Institutional setting is less significant than initially anticipated and family support (environment) is more instrumental for college students than expected. Today 80% of African American students enrolled in a college or university attend a PWI. New studies need to be conducted examining the new melting pot that exists on today's colleges and universities (Freeman, 1998). These studies should also take into account the family environment, not solely regarding SES and educational levels of parents, but these studies should take a more holistic approach and seek to understand the support and educational advice that African Americans of all income brackets give to their children.

Another limitation within the study is that family socioeconomic status is self-reported by the students based on their recall of their childhood. There is no information provided to prove the socioeconomic class of students. A future study should include parents and students so that this data may be more accurately reflected.

The final limitation of this study involves the indicator of family involvement/influence. This study does not provide information about what family member (family members) the student is referring to when they discuss the role their

family has had in their decision to continue their education. Literature reports to the significant role that mothers play in their children's academic success. A future study should have the student identify what family member (family members) they are referring to when they talk about family support. This will allow researchers to determine if there are different levels of support and influence based on family members.

Conclusion

There have been numerous studies regarding the educational processes of African American students in college. Most of this research has provided a deficit model regarding the outcomes of African Americans. For example, many traditional models (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Bluestone, 1970; Moynihan, 1965) explain "negative adult outcomes for African Americans as vestiges of chronic poverty and economic deprivation in childhood and adolescence" (Mizell, 1999). However, emphasis on a single factor may lead to erroneous conclusions by excluding other avenues of explanation (Mizell, 1999). To this end, the current research incorporated multiple variables to explore the factors associated with the decision to seek a graduate or professional school education for African American students. Unlike previous studies (Birkett & Kiel, 1995; Gray, 1978), which have examined the factors related to graduate or professional attendance, the current study sought not only to identify significant factors, but also to understand the process by which educational decisions are made. Based on the results of this study, the student's own educational (perceived academic ability) and occupational desires are the most significant factor regarding their desire to continue their education past undergraduate school. Students' faith in their ability does not appear to be hampered by the larger environment (macrosystem). Given that this study was conducted at the

individual level and only sampled from two settings, caution must be exercised in generalizing this finding. Additionally, the family agent is regarded as the most influential socialization agent (microsystem) in assisting students with their educational decisions. The results of this study suggested that the decision to attend graduate or professional school is made prior to entering undergraduate school. Once in college, students with plans to continue their education seek out opportunities, resources, and individuals (i.e. mentors, peers) to assist them in achieving their goals.

The primary reason why closing the educational gap is particularly important is because educators and economists are in agreement on the importance of increasing African American participation in graduate education (Freeman, 1999). Considering that approximately one-third of the students in the United States are people of color and since specific populations in society (particularly people of color) tend to earn fewer advanced degrees, they are continually financially disadvantaged (Freeman, 1999). More specifically, Simms (1995) discusses the direct relationship between African American participation in education and African American participation in the economy. By studying higher education from the perspectives of African Americans, along with their own insights gained from personal values and experiences, decision makers will have a better chance of developing policies and programs that will lead to the success of both graduate education and African Americans in society.

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Appendix A

Email Sent to Campus Organizations

(Insert President of the Organization's Name Here):

Currently, I am working towards finishing my doctorate degree in the area of Community Psychology. I am emailing you to request the assistance of the (Insert Organization Name) as I work towards finishing my research. I am conducting a study examining the factors influencing African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school. To conduct this study I am searching for African American seniors to complete a brief survey. I am emailing you to see if your organization can assist me in this effort. If possible, can I attend one of your meetings to announce my study and recruit research participants? Additionally, do you know of any other organizations on campus that service the African American community? Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Thank you,

Aisha Smith, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Ecological-Community Psychology

Appendix B

Email Sent to Organization Advisors

(Advisor Name Inserted Here):

My name is Aisha Smith. Currently, I am completing my doctoral degree in Ecological-Community Psychology. For my dissertation I am examining the factors that influence African American students decision to attend graduate or professional school. Recently, I defended my proposal and now I am recruiting research subjects. I am looking for African American seniors with a G.P.A. of 2.75 or higher. Considering that you work specifically with underrepresented students, I thought you might be able to assist me in my research efforts. Any assistance you can provide would be beneficial. Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Aisha Smith, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Ecological-Community Psychology

Appendix C

Qualitative Recruitment Form

Finally, we would like to know if we could have permission to possibly contact you at a later date to participate in a short interview. The interview would further investigate the factors related to graduate or professional school attendance for African American students.

The interview is estimated to take 45 minutes. If we could contact you later please provide your name and contact information. By providing your information it is not absolute that you will be contacted. Interview subjects will be randomly selected from all students who provide permission to contact them.

If you are not interested in being interviewed, simply hand your survey in to the investigator.

By providing your information you are giving us permission to contact you at a later date.

Print Name

Phone Number

Email Address

Do you plan on attending graduate or professional school during the next academic school year?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please tear this form from your survey and hand it in separately to the investigator.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix D

Final Scale Used

Demographic

1. ____ What is your present age?
2. ____ Gender
3. ____ Cumulative G.P.A.
____ Major G.P.A.
4. What is your mother's occupation? _____
5. What is your father's occupation? _____
6. My mom and/or dad have a graduate or professional degree (master's, doctorate, MD, etc.)

A. Mom only – yes B. Dad only – yes C. Mom and Dad – yes D. Neither
7. What is your parent's marital status?
A. Never Married
B. Married
C. Divorced
D. Widowed
8. What is your current marital status?
A. Never Married
B. Married
C. Divorced
D. Widowed
9. Major:
A. Psychology
B. Industrial Technology
C. Education
D. Business
E. Rehabilitation Studies or Allied Health Sciences
F. Social Work
G. Nursing
H. Biology/Chemistry/Math/Physics
I. Other _____

10. Within the next year do you plan on attending?

A. Graduate School

a. Master's Program

b. Joint M.A./Ph.D. Program

c. Other _____

B. Professional School

a. Medical School

b. Law School

c. Pharmacy School

d. Other _____

C. Neither

11. Do you have any kids?

A. Yes

B. No

Appendix D (Continued)

You have been asked to participate in a study to examine the attitudes, perceptions, and influences of African American's and graduate/professional school attendance.

First we would like to know how **YOU** view education and your attitude towards education.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. Based on their experiences, my parents say people like us are not always paid or promoted according to our education.	1	2	3	4	5
2. All I need to learn for my future is to read, write, and make change.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Although my parents tell me to get a good education in order to get a good job, they face barriers to job success.	1	2	3	4	5
4. When our professors give us homework, my friends never think of doing it.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Studying in school rarely pays off later with good jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Education is the key to success in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
7. If everyone in America gets a good education, we can end poverty.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Achievement and effort in school lead to job success later on.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The way for poor people to become middle class is for them to get a good education.	1	2	3	4	5
10. School success is not necessarily a clear path to a better life.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Getting a good education is a practical road to success for a young African American man/woman like me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Young African American men/women like me have a chance of making it if we do well in school.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Education really pays off in the future for young African American men/women like me.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D (Continued)

Next we would like to ask questions about how you view your educational abilities. Specifically, how well you think you can do in academia.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Don't Know 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	-----------------	------------	---------------------

1. If I try hard, I will get into graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I think I can do the level of work required of me in graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think I would be able to accept the failure of not getting into a graduate or professional school program as long as I have tried my best.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I will continue to try to get into graduate or professional school year after year by reapplying, retaking test, and making more contacts with different schools and different professors.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I believe I will get into graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Having the same hard work effort I displayed in undergraduate school will help me be successful in graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D (Continued)

In the following section, we would like to know if you had a **mentor/faculty member/professor** that actively helped you with the decision to attend (or not attend) graduate or professional school.

Considering the **mentor/faculty member/professor** most influential in your educational decisions please answer the following questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. Gone out of his/her way to promote your academic interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Conveyed feelings of respect for you as an individual.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Conveyed empathy for the concerns and feelings you have discussed with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Encouraged you to talk openly about anxiety and fears that detract from your work.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Shared personal experiences as an alternative perspective to your problems.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Shared history of his/her career with you.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Encouraged you to prepare for graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Served as a role model.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Helped you finish assignments/tasks or meet deadlines that would have been otherwise difficult to complete.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Helped you improve your writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Helped you with a presentation (either within your department, or at a conference).	1	2	3	4	5
12. Given you challenging assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Have provided guidance in making graduate or professional school plans.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Would be disappointed if you do not attend graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Have assisted you in preparing your graduate or professional school application.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D (Continued)

In the following section we would like to ask you a few questions regarding your close friends. Thinking about whom you consider your close friends, how do you think they view education?

Please answer the following questions in regards to your **CLOSE FRIENDS**:

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Don't Know 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	-----------------	------------	---------------------

1. Most of my close friends want to discuss topics in class that few students understand.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most of my close friends carry more courses than other students.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most of my close friends usually get good grades, even when others do poorly.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Most of my close friends feel confident they can achieve what they set out to do.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most of my close friends seek out professors to talk with about ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Most of my close friends are involved with many school activities.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Most of my close friends spend time and effort on homework and assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Most of my close friends are going to graduate or professional school after graduation.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Most of my close friends think education is important.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Most of my close friends participate in programs that will prepare them for graduate or professional school.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Most of my close friends have discussed their future educational plans with me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Most of my close friends think that I should continue my education.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D (Continued)

In the following section we would like to know about how your family views education and your educational aspirations.

Thinking about your **FAMILY**, how have they supported and influenced your education.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. My family praises me for trying even if I do not succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My family supports me in the things I do.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My family cares about my education.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My family encourages me to use my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My family encourages me to try my own ideas and be responsible for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My family makes me feel confident in my schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My family is concerned about my future.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My family is satisfied with my academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My family wants me to work hard at school.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My family thinks that it is important for me to continue my education.	1	2	3	4	5
11. When I graduate from undergraduate school, my family would want me to continue my education.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My family encourages me to do well in school.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D (continued)

In this final section, we are interested in knowing what (if any) steps you have taken towards entering graduate or professional school.

Please answer the following questions regarding **your own actions** towards continuing your education.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Don't Know 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	-----------------	------------	---------------------

1. I have sent quite a few applications/resumes to graduate or professional schools.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have already been accepted into a graduate or professional school program.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have completed the application process.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am currently waiting to hear from graduate or professional schools that I have applied.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have already made my decision about what graduate or professional school I am attending next year.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix E

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Group that is going to graduate or professional school

1. Why do you want to go to graduate/professional school?

Example: Your major requires it?

2. Growing up how important was education in your household?

Probe: Did your parents help you with your homework?

- a. Was your family supportive in your decision to attend graduate or professional school? If so, how were they supportive?

Ex. They helped pay for application fees.

3. Regarding your close friends, how important is education?

- a. Do any of your close friends have similar career and educational aspirations?

i. Please explain.

- b. Were your close friends supportive of your decision?

Probe: Do you study together?

Probe: Do you help each other try to reach your set career and educational goals?

4. What do you expect from graduate or professional school?

- a. Are there any specific barriers or challenges that you anticipate as an African American going to graduate or professional school?

- b. How do you think you will do in graduate or professional school?

- c. What is it about you that you think would have you be successful in graduate or professional school

5. Do you feel that your institution adequately prepared you to successfully matriculate in a graduate/professional school program?

Probe: Were there resources available on campus to help you learn more about graduate/professional school? Example: Graduate school fair

- a. What could your institution have done differently?

- b. Do you think if you went to a different school you would have been better prepared? How so?

Ex. Do you wish there could have been additional stats courses etc.

- c. Within your institution did you have a mentor/faculty member that helped you with the decision to attend graduate or professional school?
 - a. If yes, was this individual African American?
 - b. If no, do you think having this support would have been helpful?

Group that is not going to graduate or professional school

1. What are you doing next year since you are not going to graduate or professional?
Ex. Are you planning on getting a job?
2. Why aren't you going to graduate or professional school?
Ex. Chosen field doesn't require it.
3. Growing up how important was education in your household?
Probe: Did your parents help you with your homework?
 - b. Was your family supportive in your decision not to attend graduate or professional school? If so, how were they supportive?
Probe: Did your family expect you get a job following college?
4. Regarding your close friends, how important is education?
 - a. Do any of your close friends have similar career and educational aspirations?
 - i. Please explain.
 - b. Were your close friends supportive of your decision?
Probe: Do you study together?
Probe: Do you help each other try to reach your set career and educational goals?
5. How do you view graduate or professional school?
 - d. Are there any specific barriers or challenges that you think that African American students going to graduate or professional school would encounter?
 - e. If you were going to graduate or professional school, how do you think you would do in graduate or professional school?
6. If you were going to graduate/professional school do you feel that your institution adequately prepared you to successfully matriculate in a graduate/professional school program?
Probe: Were there resources available on campus to help you learn more about graduate/professional school? Example: Graduate school fair
 - d. What could your institution have done differently?

- e. Do you think if you went to a different school you would have been better prepared? How so?
Ex. Do you wish there could have been additional stats courses etc.
- f. Within your institution did you have a mentor/faculty member that helped you make decisions about your career?
 - a. If yes, was this individual African American?
 - b. If no, do you think having this support would have been helpful?

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