African Americans and the Doctoral Experience: A Case Comparison Through Bell's Interest Convergence

Pamela Petrease Felder
University of Pennsylvania

Marco J. Barker
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Increasing rates of doctoral degree completion for African Americans demonstrate potential for continued growth and development of a diverse pool of scholars. However, African Americans still face tremendous racial inequities during the doctoral process. The student-faculty relationship provides a lens for understanding these inequities particularly as they relate to the ways scholarly interests are addressed. Derrick Bell's concept of Interest Convergence provides conceptual guidance for understanding the ways students and faculty members consider their interests within their relationships. Qualitative data of 18 African American doctoral students and doctoral degree completers includes reflections about race, research interests, the student-faculty relationship, the process of student and faculty interests converging or diverging, and the role of environment in supporting this process. This work uses phenomenology to examine perceptions of the student-faculty relationship within two different institutional environments among African American doctoral students at various stages of the doctoral process and beyond degree completion. Additionally, how race shape students' perceptions of interactions with faculty and how these perceptions influence academic success and degree completion are addressed. Several implications are discussed for future development of research, practice, and policy.

INTRODUCTION

The student-faculty relationship, one of the most essential relationships during the doctoral process, involves both formal and informal advising practices in facilitating and developing

research interests (Lovitts, 2001). Additionally, the student and faculty member may represent similar (convergent) and different (divergent) interests that extend beyond research but may still impact the doctoral experience (Felder & Barker, 2013). This concept of how interests enrich or convolute the relationship is made further complex by racial differences. The racial dynamic in understanding convergent and divergent interests was first examined by Bell's (1980) conceptualization of interest convergence and later examined by Barker and Felder in the context of doctoral education. This work continues this discussion on doctoral education with additional consideration about the institutional impact on interest convergence.

While the number of degrees attained has increased over generations, the representation of African American[1] doctoral degree recipients remains a cause for concern.   For example, in 1977, African Americans earned 3.8% of all doctoral degrees and by 2005 that increased to a mere 5.8% (Hoffer, Welch, Webber, Williams, & Lisek, 2006). Previous research about African American degree attainment has deemed low degree completion rates at preceding educational levels and an under-representation of minority faculty as two primary causes for the slow progression of African American doctoral degree completion rates in the United States (Allen, Haddad, & Kirkland, 1984; Gasman et al., 2008; Felder Thompson, 2008; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). Within elite institutions, there is a lack of faculty diversity coupled with historical legacies of exclusion that cultivate alienating educational environments (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen 1998).   In these elite environments, the stakes for developing successful faculty-student advising relationships becomes higher since there are lower levels of African American doctoral student enrollment (Gasman et al., 2008). Table 1 represents the disparity of African American doctoral degree completers among other racial groups by discipline. In 1991, Blacks represented less than 5% of degree completers for all fields of study. In 2011, this degree completion advanced slightly beyond 5% for African Americans in all fields of study.

For many African American doctoral students, progress towards degree completion involves navigating relationships critical to academic success.   These relationships thrive when students successfully learn the norms, traditions, and knowledge within their discipline. The process of this learning experience is also referred to as socialization and is typically facilitated by faculty advisors (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Socialization is defined by Brim (1966) as the "process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society" (p. 3). Given that faculty and students enter into these socialization relationships from different perspectives, examining how interest convergence develops within these relationships can provide valuable insight about the types of barriers within these relationships as well as how these relationships support and facilitate degree completion and success.
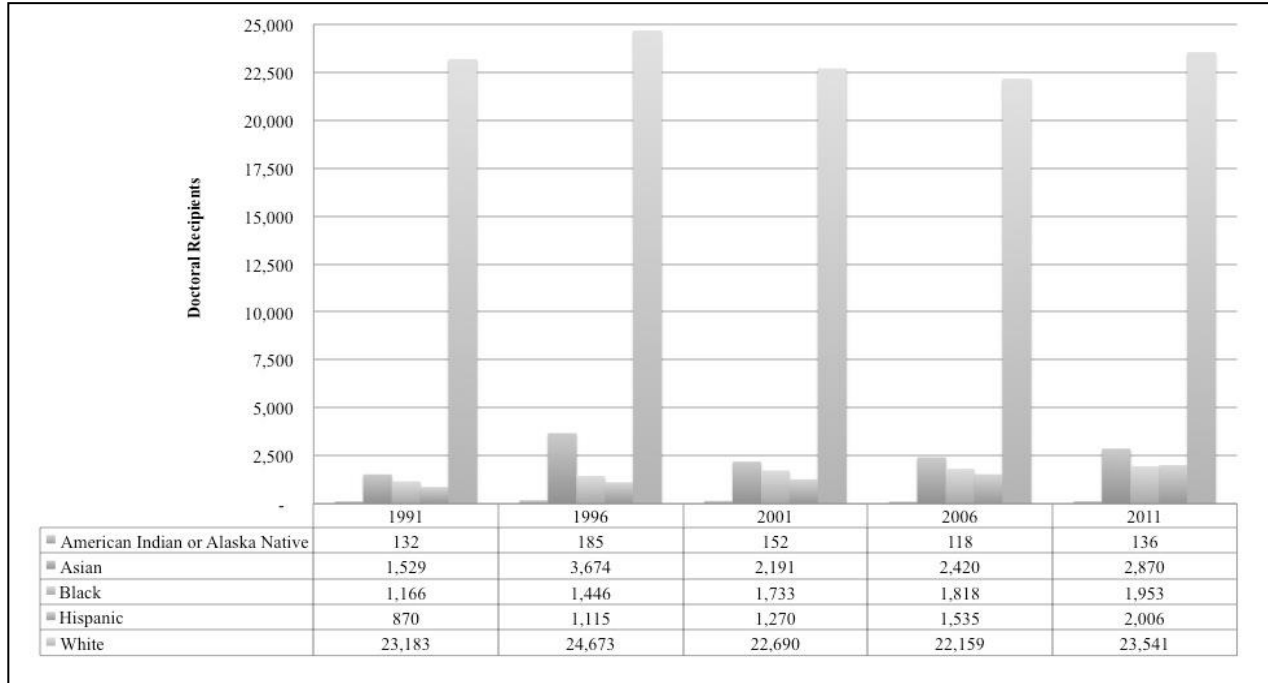
Within the doctoral process, Derrick Bell's (1980a, 1980b) scholarship on interest provides a framework for examining the ways in which the students' interests converge within their relationships with faculty and their academic environments (Felder and Barker, 2013). This work builds upon Felder and Barker's examination of interest convergence within the doctoral process by focusing on advising as a culturally-focused practice and exploring the experiences of African American doctoral students and degree recipients. Analysis in this work addresses the

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[1]The racial categories of African-American and Black are used interchangeably throughout the paper and largely describe colonized Americans of African descent. These identities are aligned with the following 2010 United States Census Brief racial definition, "Black or African American" refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011).

ways in which their student interests may converge or diverge with their faculty relationships and institutional environment. While there is emerging literature on the diverse aspects of student experiences within doctoral education (Gardner, 2010), our purpose is two-fold: 1) to build upon existing knowledge by expanding discussions about the racial and cultural facets of the doctoral student experience and how faculty mentoring and institutional climate shape doctoral student development towards degree completion; and 2) to recommend practices that facilitate student success.

Table 1
Degree Completion Trends by Race for All Disciplines between 1991-2011. National Science Foundation.

	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
American Indian or Alaska Native	132	185	152	118	136
Asian	1,529	3,674	2,191	2,420	2,870
Black	1,166	1,446	1,733	1,818	1,953
Hispanic	870	1,115	1,270	1,535	2,006
White	23,183	24,673	22,690	22,159	23,541

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Exploring the Student-Faculty Experience at the Doctoral Level

Doctoral students work towards benchmarks, where they must continually manage their role as a doctoral student, the expectation of the program, and their relationship with their faculty, department, peers, and larger national and/or international disciplinary communities (Gardner, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Golde, 2005; Walker et al., 2008) while undergoing doctoral socialization. Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) defined doctoral socialization as the two-way, "developmental process" through which a doctoral student acquires a disciplinary identity and understanding of disciplinary practices and norms through "knowledge acquisition, investment [or commitment], and involvement" (p. 11).   In this environment, faculty members are the most critical in assisting the student in navigating the doctoral experience and the discipline (Lovitts, 2001). In Chun-Mei, Golde, and McCormick's (2007) study, one student described the student-faculty advisor relationship as this:

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of the student-advisor relationship. One cannot be too careful about choosing an advisor. This is both a personal and professional relationship that rivals marriage and parenthood in its complexity, variety and ramifications for the rest of one's life (p. 263).

Similarly, Lovitts (2001) described the advisor as the "central and most powerful person not only on a graduate student's dissertation committee but also during the student's trajectory through graduate school" (p. 131). Although some doctoral education scholars have called for a reengineering of apprenticeship models in graduate education (Walker et al., 2008), the faculty advisor still remains central to the success of doctoral students. Most importantly, cultural dynamics in doctoral education are becoming more relevant as graduate school enrollment becomes more diverse (Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 2005)—particularly with Blacks experiencing the most growth in total graduate enrollment (Bell, 2011).

While there has been an increase in advising research, a majority of this work focuses on undergraduate advising (Creamer, 2000; Frank, 2000; McCalla-Wriggins, 2000; Priest & McPhee, 2000); however, there are stark differences between undergraduate and graduate advising. While undergraduate advising consists of a relationship between students and professional advisors, graduate advising involves a more complex system of students, faculty, departments, and disciplinary communities within and beyond the institution (Kramer, 2000; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel & Hutchings, 2008).

Additionally, researchers call for a greater exploration of the student's cultural perspective of faculty advising and mentorship on graduate student socialization (Gasman et al., 2008; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Other research (e.g., Padilla's Expertise Model (1991) has focused on the value of the student experience as an informative resource for learning about student progress as well as the effects of institutional climates and interactions between students and faculty. Padilla's work emphasizes understanding the experiences of successful students of color who attain both theoretical and heuristic knowledge to overcome barriers to success.

The Role of Campus Racial Climate

Research on campus racial climate focuses on racial tensions and incidents within predominantly White college campuses to better understand racial conflict associated with the student experience (Hurtado, 1992). The racial climate for Black graduate or doctoral students may be a reflection of the student's interaction with the institution (Clark & Garza, 1994), department (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001), and individuals (i.e., faculty and students) (Milner, 2004). According to Nettles (1990), Black doctoral students report a greater sense of racial discrimination than Latino/a and White doctoral students. Robinson (1999) found that doctoral students in predominantly White settings sometimes felt a sense of "social estrangement and socio-cultural alienation" (p. 124).

Further, doctoral students have also reported feeling invisible (Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders, 1997), isolated (Sligh-DeWalt, 2004), and undervalued (Milner, 2004). These instances lead to Black students feeling as if they must over-perform (Bonilla, Pickron, & Tatum, 1994; Milner, 2004) or feeling that the quality of their work is less than that of their White peers (Bonilla et al.), thereby creating a sense of academic vulnerability. Research on African American student persistence has found that prejudice, racism, and discrimination can negatively impact a student's commitment to his or her institution (Steele, 1997; Shelton & Sellers, 2000;

Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). This impact negatively affects their ability to negotiate the environment both academically and socially. Furthermore, these experiences and feelings may also impact the racial and academic identity development of Black doctoral students (Barker, 2012; Felder, 2010) and in other cases lead to racial trauma (Truong & Museus, 2012).

Previous studies of doctoral students may not fully address factors that contribute to the marginalization experience for African Americans as these doctoral students are under pressure to be politically sensitive to the organizational dynamics of their programs (Taylor & Antony, 2000; Thompson, 2006). Therefore, we explore the experiences of doctoral students at various levels, ranging from enrolled to program completion, with an emphasis on the interaction between the student and her or his advisor, faculty, environment.

African American doctoral students may find it difficult to find the right faculty adviser—one who can mentor their professional development and shape their disciplinary identities during their graduate student socialization experiences (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008; Thompson, 2006). Professional identity development at the doctoral level entails the creation of a research agenda and the cultivation of collegial relationships that are important to continued success after degree attainment (Gardner & Barnes 2007; Lovitts, 2001).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Derrick Bell's Interest Convergence

While interest convergence is often cited in higher education literature in conjunction with critical race theory as a major tenet of diversity research (Baez, 2003, 2004, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2011; Harper & Patton, 2007; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009), we acknowledge the relational aspects of negotiation, the racial and power dynamics involved in this negotiation, and the building of racial equality awareness. Our work on doctoral student advising advances Bell's (1980 a, 1980 b) notion of interest convergence. Hence, interest convergence is presented as an element of the advising process whereby a student's interest converges with the interests held by his or her faculty advisor and is supported by the organizational culture (e.g., institutional mission, departmental climate and culture).

Interest convergence is multi-dimensional and highly subjective to each student-faculty relationship and context and serves as a useful tool for guiding a discussion about African American doctoral student advising. African American doctoral degree completion is highly dependent on successful advising or mentoring relationships that serve to support students' scholarly interest and perceptions of organizational support. Two important questions we consider are: How do African American doctoral students' experience the student-faculty relationship? And, how can interest convergence facilitate an awareness of race within these relationships?

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology serves to capture qualitative data including perceptions of the student-faculty experience and its essence. Phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry that identifies the essence of the human condition (Creswell, 2009). We examine interviewee perceptions within two institutional contexts to understand the essence of the student-faculty relationship from an African American perspective. The use of qualitative research allows the researcher to devise an intentional approach to studying the complexities of situations, experiences, or phenomena. Such qualitative inquiry includes three tenets: "the researcher matters, the inquiry into meaning is in service of understanding, and qualitative inquiry embraces new ways of looking at the world" (Shank, 2006, p. 10). Hence, this approach facilitates the development of innovative perspectives regarding the potential interests and benefits associated with the student-faculty relationship.

Previous research highlights students' perceptions of academic friends, family, and faculty in building social support networks for doctoral students (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Additionally, we contend that environment and race are critical aspects in understanding the African American lived condition within the doctoral process. Therefore, to broaden our understanding of the student experience phenomena, we chose to compare qualitative data, allowing us to confirm and cross-validate student perceptions of environment and race on the advising experience (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). We followed Creswell and Plano Clark's exploratory mixed method qualitative analysis procedures to organize data, code and compare themes, identify interrelated categories, and employ peer review for data validation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Comparison of the qualitative data allowed us to explore the "essence" of student experience within two different environments; serving to minimize threat and legitimate our presentation of phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Thus, by widening our scope beyond one institutional context the essence of the student-faculty relationship is expanded for a richer analysis. Both contexts offer unique historical features of African American educational exclusion where racial tension is prevalent. Private institutions (particularly predominately White institutions) carry the history of exclusion and marginalization of the African American student experience; and the south is the primary region for the historical and systemic enslavement of African Americans (Anderson, 1993; 2005). Both institutional cases are predominantly White academic environments.

Case One – Private University

The first study included eleven African American doctoral degree completers who provided retrospective perspectives of their doctoral experiences. Perspectives focus on student-faculty relationships and student perceptions of campus climate between 1999 and 2005 from degree completers who have not held their degrees for more than five years. The five-year time frame is consistent with several data reporting guidelines focused on exploring the characteristics of doctoral students. This includes the National Science Foundation's US Doctorates in the 20th Century Special Report (2006). Interview responses are retrospective within the scope of completion. Thus, student perceptions are defined to encompass degree completion as a definite result of success; not from a standpoint of potential degree completion.

Participants were identified through contacting an alumni office of an elite graduate school and using snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009). Self-selected participants recommended other individuals to interview who might want to share their experiences (Creswell, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend snowball sampling in theory-building analysis and mentions that it "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich" (p. 28). This private institution has a tremendous history of excluding African Americans from admission. This type of legacy is rife with political tension, controversy and racial conflict (Karabel, 2005). Interview participants who shared perspectives about the environment and racism with peers and colleagues were viewed as expert subjects for this study. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol and focus on commitment to the goal of the institution and completion of the doctoral degree. Participants were asked to identify how environment and faculty contributed to their completion. Each interview was about 60 minutes in length.

Case Two – Public University

The second study explored the experiences of Black doctoral students at a predominantly White institution involved in cross-race advising relationships with White faculty. The sample for the second study included seven Black doctoral students at one predominantly White research institution or PWI in the South (McCormick, 2001). The context of the South is important given the tumultuous history of desegregation, racism, and exclusivity in higher education, particularly Black students' access to southern PWIs (Anderson, 1998, 2003; Watkins, 2001). Student participants completed at least two years of course work, studied in the social sciences and humanities, identified as Black or African American, had a White faculty advisor, and attended the institution. Compared to students just beginning their program, students who have completed at least half of their coursework are closer to working with faculty along the doctoral education stages of persistence (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Open-ended interviews ranged between 60 to 90 minutes. A standardized open-ended interview protocol was utilized. All participants were asked the same questions in the same order; however, the questions were open-ended and facilitated an in-depth investigation of their "thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about" race (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 183). The protocol was designed using themes from the literature, theoretical frameworks, and my personal experiences and observations. The final samples for both cases are represented in Diagram 1.
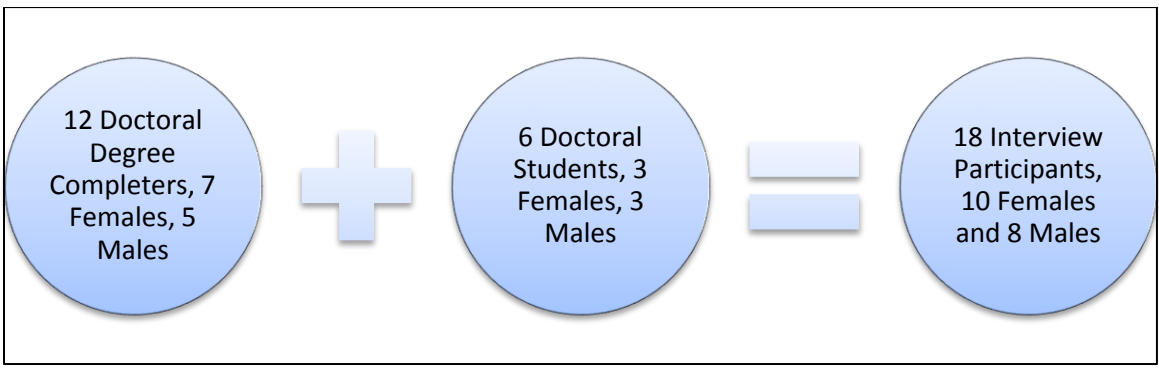

12 Doctoral Degree Completers, 7 Females, 5 Males

6 Doctoral Students, 3 Females, 3 Males

18 Interview Participants, 10 Females and 8 Males

Diagram 1. Case Comparison Study Participants

Because the interplay of race, personal interests, and relationships may be reflective of an individual's lived experience in her or his doctoral program, we reexamined both data sets through a phenomenological framework. Phenomenological strategies included identifying significant statements pertaining to interest convergence emerging from the transcribed interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Significant statements were those statements that provided "rich detail" and were relevant to the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, p. 367)—the phenomenon representing interactions that pertained to race and the representation of similar or competing interests. After identifying significant statements, we created a list of meanings associated with significant statements. The third step involved searching for themes among the significant statements and similar and different experiences of the participants. This step included two components: thematic assignment or coding and constant comparison.

Thematic coding included classifying meanings into themes that emerge from a review of the significant meanings. Moustakas (1994) detailed phenomenological reduction consisting of bracketing or identifying descriptions only related to the research question and topic, horizontalizing or treating each statement as having "equal value" (p. 97), clustering reduced descriptions into themes, and organizing those themes or clusters into "textual descriptions (p. 97). We reduced data to only those experiences that included experiences where opinions or perspectives were noted to be similar or in competition with those of faculty, advisor, or the environment. To set forth strategies that addressed race as a feature of successful advising, we acknowledged Milner's (2004) framework of researcher racial and cultural positionality, which allowed consideration of our own racial experiences in relation to our participants, their racial positions, and the racial saliency and relevance involved with developing a cultural approach to advising.

FINDINGS

Across both cases, there were instances where African American doctoral students felt that their scholarly and personal interests converged, diverged, or needed to be protected in relation to their faculty advisor and their environment (i.e., departmental and institutional culture and climate). While each institution presented unique environments, the interest convergence framework offered a useful way to explore the relations between doctoral students, advisors, and the environment—in addition to examining the intersection of race, behavior, and interests.

Two major themes or categories emerged from the case comparison that captured the experiences of the students and their interactions during the doctoral process: 1) Interactions with Faculty and 2) Interactions with the Environment (aspects of the academic environment that influence the student-faculty relationship). Students' perceptions of these interactions and settings were often binary: positive or negative. Despite that students navigated or were navigating the doctoral experience at different institutions, the findings showed that doctoral students across both institutions described positive experiences as those experiences where there was a convergence of interests between themselves and faculty and their institutional environment. However, instances where students felt a disconnection between their interests and beliefs with that of a faculty member or the campus environment or climate resulted in students feeling undervalued.

Student-Faculty Interactions

Students described varying interactions ranging from faculty advising on academic matters to faculty discussing cultural or racial issues both related and unrelated to the students' research. These interactions or conversations resulted in interest convergence, divergence, and non-disclosure. Students who did not disclose made an intentional effort to not share their personal interests.

The doctoral student participants, particularly in Case One, noted experiences that negatively impacted interest convergence—difficulty gaining access to faculty, particularly White faculty. Faculty inaccessibility was a barrier in forming a connection or finding shared interests with faculty. Consistent with research, students not having access to faculty negatively impacts doctoral student success (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Most importantly, Felder (2010) and Taylor and Antony (2000) found that having access to faculty is extremely important to the success of African American doctoral students. Though, it's important to note that access to faculty appeared to be perceived differently among students. One student in Case One, Tracy, "felt at home" and was able to access and connect to the Black faculty in her department. However, she was only successful in connecting with one or two White faculty members. This connection often related to her advisor connecting her with "people who had similar research interests." Edward, another doctoral student at Case One's institution, felt identifying and connecting to faculty was difficult and "was like being in a swamp … trying to find the dry spots; the dry spots being the supportive faculty." These quotes suggest that when faculty accessibility is low, the opportunity for students to find faculty members with whom they can discuss their interests becomes challenging and serves to impede the interest convergence described by Bell (1980). The inaccessibility of faculty also serves to create "chilly climates" often associated with the African American student experience within predominately White institutions (PWIs) (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Contrastingly, some doctoral students avoided informal relationships and preferred maintaining more professional relationships. These doctoral students felt it was important to separate one's personal self (i.e., feelings, background, attitudes, perceptions on life, etc.) from one's professional self (i.e., academics, university life, dissertation, etc.). This type of demarcation in interaction resulted in the doctoral students not being very open with their faculty advisors when compared to their White counterparts. Creating these barriers further limits opportunities for interest convergence where there would otherwise exist moments for bridging interests between faculty and student.

Most of the doctoral students created boundaries as described above and "emotional" distance between them and their advisors for the purpose of protecting personal interests for the sake of survival. According to Barker (2012), Black doctoral students develop mechanisms and techniques to cope with and navigate their own Black identity in White spaces. As it pertains to Bell's (1980) discussion of interest convergence, it is difficult to achieve such convergence given the historical significance of race and the possibility of students feeling that racial climates within doctoral programs are not supportive. In developing a culturally receptive approach to advising, faculty must consider how African American students negotiate the historical significance of exclusionary institutional climates and how they serve to shape student perspectives about faculty-student interactions.

One of the most consistent findings among students across both cases were the role of coursework and research in offering opportunities for students and faculty to find and share common interests. This traditional notion of critiquing scholarship connects to Bell's (1980) original position of interest convergence. Several doctoral students mentioned that they gained insight into their advisor's perceptions and understandings of race through discussing research. Terrie of Case Two, provided an example of discussing with her advisor the role and implications of race emerging from her study.

In Terrie's and other students' cases, the dissertation topic of the doctoral student differed from the research of the faculty advisor. In these cases, the faculty advisor would ask questions about the student's topic or a specific concept. Similar to Terrie, another student from Case Two, Lionel, whose study included critical race theory, gave an example of how his professor engaged in learning more:

> He's asked me about it and I've explained it to him and he's talked to other professors about it and he thinks it's very interesting.

Lionel shared that while race was not his advisor's central research area, his professor was willing to learn more and to assist Lionel in his dissertation research. Interest convergence ensues when a faculty member is generally interested in sup-porting a student's work despite a lack of centrality regarding topic. Those students who were studying race felt that their faculty member either had an understanding of the research and was willing to learn more about the topic and frequently asked questions or was able to direct them to others who could add to their research. Students felt a strong sense of support when their faculty showed an interest in the student's own scholarly interest, signifying movement of convergence toward a shared interest. This behavior of demonstrating an interest in one's work is an example of interest convergence (Bell, 1980) in the doctoral process and how it positively impacts the doctoral experience. Although there were racial connections or learning moments between faculty and students, there were other academic moments where students felt that their faculty advisor was not racially inclusive. Marion from Case Two felt a sense of being undervalued in her advisor's classroom. She said,

> Well, I've always known that I've always been, you know, in the minority…a minority student in a larger population of majority people. I knew that I would be judged by my race. I knew I could partially be judged by the way I speak. I knew that no matter how smart I am or what degree I'm going for that some people will always be judged as being not as good or not as smart. I think that came across in one of my classes where we all were doctoral students, but it was very clear by some of the other students in the class that my input or any other African American doc student's input wasn't valued as much as the other students.

More prevalent in Case One, a doctoral degree completer, Parrish, discussed how he felt undervalued as result of a faculty member's insensitivity to his research topic,

> I think a whole lot of faculty didn't take my work very seriously or even knew what I was doing. I had one faculty member pull me aside and sort of whispered to me in her office, "I just want you to know that hip hop is not going to be

around forever, so you better make sure you do something other than hip hop" as if all I did all day was like write down rap lyrics, you know what I mean. As if my work was devoid of any sort of intellectual merit or rigor. She was actually trying to look out for me.

In this example, the doctoral student felt a divergence between her research interests, as a Black doctoral student, and those of her advisor. In contrast to Bell's (1980) interest convergence, these occurrences do not foster discovery and may create negative distance between the student and faculty, resulting in the student not feeling valued and having an overall low satisfaction in the doctoral program.

Interaction with the Environment

The ways in which an institution or department practices and demonstrates a commitment to diversity can shape the African American doctoral student experience (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008). The African American doctoral students within Cases One and Two provided examples where there existed levels of divergence between departmental and institutional policies, culture, and climate. In some instances, "interests" reflected philosophies on diversity—the commitment to supporting diversity in general and doctoral students of color in particular. Within the role of environment theme, students referred to organizational behaviors or decision-making that were counterintuitive to Bell's concept of interest convergence where the notion of diversity was not engaged by both the student and the environment.

Within departmental contexts, more doctoral students from Case Two as opposed to those students in Case One identified how they saw race play a role in departmental decisions. Lionel from Case Two shared the advisor assignment process and feeling marginalized because he felt that he was chosen because he was a Black male. He described how he believed that his advisor's "initial interest" was due to feeling that "these Black [students] are going need more help and support." However, he felt that toward the end of his experience, his advisor's perspective had changed:

He was probably really impressed. I think that [was] his initial [feeling]…being impressed. Okay, these Black [students] are more capable than what I expected. And I hope that he decided that I'm not just capable for an African American, but I'm capable as a student, period.

Jordon from Case Two felt that her department was not committed to the success of students of color in the same ways it was committed to the success of White students. Jordon felt that the department allowed White students to complete the program with greater flexibility than students of color. She observed part-time White students with families progressing through the program at faster rates than full-time Black doctoral students. She shared,

I didn't work. I devoted full-time to my academics. So, I still haven't graduated. But you have some White students who, for example, I just found out that one student is graduating [soon]. The student started the same semester I started. She's part-time, out-of-state, and carries a full-time job. That just don't even make sense, but with them, they can say, "I'm getting married," or "I'm pregnant," and

you know, "We need money." So when they [come] up with their life excuses or reasons, then, they get pushed through the program; whereas for us, it doesn't. We can't just say, "I have this issue. I need to graduate." It doesn't work like that. We have to still, you know, prove ourselves and almost be two times better to get out the program.

In the above experiences, students described a more systemic conflict of Bell's interest convergence as the students' personal interests did not appear supported by the department or institution. Research studies (Bonilla et al., 1994) indicate that Black doctoral students may also feel undervalued through departmental or classroom practices. The racial climate for Black doctoral students may be a reflection of the interaction between the student and institution (Clark & Garza, 1994). The students highlighted racialized departmental practices, which shaped their view of the department and its focus. These common, everyday practices may also be described as micro-aggressions (Sue, Capodilup, & Holder, 2008; Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011; Wing, 2010) where slight actions continuously attack the individual. Antithetical to Bell's (1980) framework, the divergence emerged as a disconnect between departmental mission and goals and African American doctoral students' perceptions of support. Bell (1980) suggested that scholars must continually ask critical questions about practices that facilitate inequality and identify remedies to improve educational practice.

Other students' experiences illustrated how the institutional environment impacted student persistence.

You could never prove it that it was hostile in court. You would have a very difficult time proving that it was hostile in court. There is no tangible evidence but it's the body language of people, the lack of acknowledgement of your existence, the lack of willingness to really listen to you … thoughts … one's thoughts … the condescending conversations that you could be involved in I think all of that … and just the way that people sort the … you know the way … it's almost as if people just see right through you … it made me feel ... well there were a range of feelings. First there might be hurt, then there would just be anger and now there is really a feeling of indifference. But …yeah I just think there is another way to put it … it is a psychologically toxic environment. (Pierce, Case #1, private PWI)

These types of racist experiences often occurred between students and faculty as opposed between student peers and often precipitated racial trauma among students (Truong & Museus, 2012).

Walter and Marion, both at the public PWI in Case Two, were in departments where faculty underestimated their abilities. Walter provided an example of excelling during qualifying exams and faculty proactively approaching him for collaboration only after proving himself. Marion described an instance where a faculty member did not consider her a doctoral student and where she later felt that grading in the course was a reflection of the faculty member's seeing her as not belonging: "'You grade me harder because you feel I'm not supposed to be here,' that kind of thing." Similar to those students in Case Two, Diane, a private PWI student in Case Two,

believed that African American doctoral students were underestimated and, unlike White doctoral students, advised to pursue programs considered less rigorous:

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

Black doctoral students receiving different information than their White counterparts that result in Black doctoral students having less access or opportunity is consistent with the literature (Milner, 2004). During her experience as a doctoral student, Sligh-Dewalt (2004) reported how advisors did not share the same level of information as evident in the information discussed among her White peers and their experiences with faculty. These additional examples further illustrated the breakdown in interest convergence where the students' interest or well-being was not supported by the institution or faculty.

The doctoral experience described by students included examples of how the research and personal interests and well-being of the students converged as illustrated through Bell's (1980) or in other cases, diverged. Points of divergence were instances when the students' interests or well-being were not supported through the actions or policies of the faculty or environment (i.e., department or institution). While Bell's framework is highly conceptual, it lends itself to understanding how the doctoral education process is a series of interests shared, differentiated, and engaged in both thought and action and how these responses; whether overt or covert, impact the experience of doctoral students and particularly the African American students in this study.

Developing an Interest Convergence Model

Given the complexity of interaction among and within the multiple levels of the universities and departments and the doctoral process across both cases, we developed both a matrix and visual model for understanding how there are competing or shared interests at play with every interaction. The model expands Bell's (1980 of interest convergence from an intellectual context to an organizational context (climate, policy, and behaviors). The matrix, Table 2, represents the type of action that may be present within the student-faculty relationship and the varying levels of interest convergence within this relationship. Certain behaviors exhibited within the institutions or by individuals may indicate a particular level of interest convergence. For example, a faculty advisor who ensures that her doctoral student of color meets doctoral milestones and advises a student studying a race-related topic but does not discuss cultural resources on campus with her student of color may operate within a moderate level of interest convergence.

Higher levels of interest convergence may have been reached through or included lower levels. While some activities within low levels of interest convergence are important (e.g., completing milestones), there are other ways in which faculty and institutions can build greater connections with students of color, resulting in higher levels of interest convergence. Students from both cases and studies described instances or experiences that fit within and across the various levels of interest convergence, which speaks to the unique relationship between the student and her or his faculty, advisor, and environment.

Table 2.
Student-Faculty Relationship Characteristics (Interest Convergence Considered)

	Low Interest Convergence	*Moderate Interest Convergence*	*High Interest Convergence*
Perceptions of Student Experiences/Advising	Obligatory relationship may involve approval of paperwork/formal representation as an adherence to policy; Advising received is not considerate of racial identity or racially focused research interests	There may be a struggle to find support regarding racial identity and research topics involving race.	Students are empowered intellectually. Race and research interests are "received" as valued contributions within the intellectual community.
Perceptions of Faculty Experiences/Advising	Obligatory relationship may involve approval of paperwork/formal representation as an adherence to policy	Moves beyond obligation to involve challenges of fit regarding research interests. Race is acknowledged but not fully engaged as an aspect of identity or research interests during advising	Faculty member is fully engaged and supportive of student research interests. This is demonstrated through research collaboration on multiple levels. Racial identity or research interests are fully supported.
Perceptions of Environment in Supporting the Student/Faculty Interactions	Inactive policies to support diversity and/or racial awareness; little to no departmental assessment focused on race; presence of historical notions of race and racism within geographical or institutional climate	Diversity and racial awareness policies exist but are not fully operationalized due to administrative/structural challenges; minimum required racial assessments are performed but no action is taken; departments recognize the role of context but may not realize how context impacts the student's experience	Diversity and racial awareness policies are operationalized and there is stakeholder appreciation; departments perform quantitative and qualitative assessments of racial climate and develop strategies to create more supportive environments OR there are clear support mechanisms for students of color; departments are institutional leaders in diversity programs and develop programs that question or critique the geographical context

Characterizing Interest Convergence

These findings suggest that thinking about advising and the doctoral experience through an interest convergence lens may facilitate conversations on the ways in which interests compete and whose interests are considered, valued, and communicated. Doctoral students are assigned to faculty members based on institutional and programmatic policy. This assignment may be loosely defined at the institutional level and regarded as a mandatory function of the academic process. Advisor assignments may be based on common academic interests. At this stage, a student's research ideas may not be clearly formulated and a specific scholarly interest may not yet be determined. A faculty member's primary activities involve scheduling mandatory meetings as indicated by policy and serving as gatekeeper for facilitating a student's academic experience towards degree completion.

Similar to "Low" level, doctoral students are assigned to faculty member based on institutional and/or programmatic policy and this relationship is developed may be loosely defined. At this level, a student's research ideas may be clearly formulated but may not be directly related to a faculty member's research area. A faculty member's primary activities involve scheduling of mandatory meetings as indicated by policy, serving as gatekeeper for facilitating a student's academic experience towards degree completion. A distinctive feature of this relationship is the faculty member's role as a "point of connection" in directing the student to resources that influence degree completion.

This level of convergence is depicted in Bell's experience. It illustrates a direct correlation between a student's interest and the advancement of a mentor's work. In Bell's case, Wechsler served in the capacity of a scholarly mentor rather than an advisor. Wechsler influenced the cultivation of Bell's research that would later facilitate Bell's professional identity development. While still possessing the functional characteristics of the previous levels, this level involves an advancement of thought and reciprocal learning among faculty and student. Other distinctive characteristics of this level include: co-teaching, co-publishing, co-grant writing and co-presenting at conferences. The student-faculty relationship is cultivated outside of the classroom through social academic activities. While these characteristics may exist at the moderate level, they are often not considered a primary research objective for the student's advancement of research. There may be departmental activities that welcome participation of all students or formal mentoring programs for student of color.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations present in this study. Data collection occurred across two different institutions. Student experience was sometimes guided by the context and may differ based on each institution's unique culture. Additionally, students in these studies pursued doctorates in the humanities and applied social science fields (i.e., business and education) and experiences across other disciplines may very (Becher, 1981). We acknowledge the limitation that different disciplinary cultures may be reflected in different doctoral student experiences (Golde, 1998).

Areas of future research may include examining advising relationships through a case study approach. Given the unique cultures of departments and the students' responses of how "departments" exhibited behaviors, it may be advantageous to study those departments with reputations of being supportive of Black doctoral students. Future research should also consider

other disciplines, particularly those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), where there is a less likelihood of faculty and students who study race--issues of race may manifest in different forms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND POLICY

Earning the doctoral degree is a daunting and challenging process (Gardner, 2010); however, faculty advisors are in a critical position to assist students in navigating this process (Lovitts, 2001). The African American doctoral students in these studies faced challenges and developed mechanisms for matriculating through or completing their doctoral program. For these students, navigating the doctorate involved negotiating their personal interests with the interests of their faculty advisor and their environment. In this section several recommendations are provided for future research, practice, and policy to facilitate understanding and continued development of academic success and degree completion.

While research about African American doctoral students continues to emerge, more research focused on their perceptions of the academy should be conducted to understand the multi-faceted nuances of the student experience. This research should involve examination of student experiences within a variety of institutional contexts to understand the nature of the student-faculty relationship and students' interactions within different academic environments. The comparison of institutions in this study expands the understanding of phenomena within one racial experience. Further examination of the student-faculty relationship with consideration of race should involve frameworks designed to explore its complicated nature within the doctoral process. For example critical race theory is developed to consider the historical, psychosocial, and contextual issues associated with the doctoral process.

More research is needed which explores both race and disciplinary differences which would address the racial connections between doctoral students and the disciplinary nuances that exist. Further, there are opportunities to explore and compare the experiences of African American doctoral students across other institutional types to examine the ways in which the environment may continue to impact the doctoral experience. This work gives impetus for examining interest convergence within other contexts and among other types of relationships (e.g., African American postdoctoral employees and junior faculty who operate within professional mentoring relationships). This research also lends itself to reconsidering the power of cross-study comparisons where existing data between studies may be analyzed using one framework to better inform our knowledge about the racial nuances associated with the African American experience. The post-hoc cross-comparison in this work is valuable when there is a common interest in understanding shared processes and circumstances related to the data being analyzed. This approach can be meaningful in laying the groundwork to develop implications for larger studies focused on these processes as they relate to the same population. Moreover, conducting mixed methods research related to the student-faculty relationship at the doctoral level is conducive to supporting "participatory/advocacy worldview" (similar to notions associated with interest convergence (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2007, p. 24).

Based on the findings in this study, learning about the practices associated with the faculty advising of doctoral students and degree completers experience is an essential aspect building relationships with faculty and with the academic environment. The findings in this work consider student perceptions of the student-faculty relationship. However, future research might examine advising within the student-faculty relationship from the faculty perspective.

Furthermore, facilitating a greater sense awareness of tools developed to support the advising process may be helpful in learning more about the ways students interact with faculty and their academic environments.

While there are innovative, new ways to expand this research, there are also recommendations for practice for African American doctoral students, faculty who work with doctoral students, and institutions with doctoral programs. Interest Convergence is a catalyst for facilitating cultural awareness. Cultural receptive advising is a step beyond cultural sensitivity towards a meaningful collaborative practice strategy. Interest convergence is a useful tool for guiding a discussion about African American doctoral student advising. It is facilitated and maximized when racial experiences are understood by other members of the academic community. African American students should critically assess their sense of racial awareness in relation to their contributions to the academic community by way of their presence and research interests. Once students identify supportive advising relationships, it's important for students to clearly articulate with their faculty advisors the ways in which race shapes their research interests.

When considering the racial and cultural experiences of doctoral students institutions should embrace policies that support diversity and racial awareness initiatives. These initiatives can only be effective if they are part of the daily institutional operations and are viewed as priority of stakeholders. These operations should include consistent quantitative and qualitative assessments of racial climate and develop strategies to create more supportive environments. There must be clear agendas for students of color that involve an acknowledgement of the potential impact of environment and race on building advising relationships. A clear purpose for establishing support of students can minimize the social isolation and doctoral student attrition (Ali & Kohun, 2007). Faculty members can lend a tremendous amount of support for these students by acknowledging student belief systems regarding race within the environment and as it relates to their academic interests.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Pamela Petrease Felder, Lecturer, University of Pennsylvania. Email: felderpp@gse.upenn.edu.