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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM LEAVERS, by SHERRIE LYNN PROCTOR, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College concurs.

_____
Stephen D. Truscott, Psy.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Greg L. Brack, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Susan Crim McClendon, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Joel Meyers, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
JoAnna F. White, Ed.D.
Chair, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services

_____
R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Sherrie Lynn Proctor

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Sherrie Lynn Proctor
215 North Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30309

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Stephen D. Truscott
Department of Counseling and Psychological Services
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083

VITA

Sherrie Lynn Proctor

ADDRESS: 215 North Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30309

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2009	Georgia State University School Psychology
Ed.S.	2000	University of South Florida School Psychology
M.A.	1997	University of South Florida School Psychology
B.A.	1996	Spelman College English

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

1999-2004	School Psychologist School District of Philadelphia

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

1996-Present	National Association of School Psychologists

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Collins, A. S., & Proctor, S. L. (2009). Turning the ideal into reality: Student perspectives on *Blueprint III's* implications for graduate education in consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 19* (3), 267-274.

Meyers, J., Meyers, A. B., Proctor, S. L., & Graybill, E. (2009). Organizational consultation and systems intervention. In Gutkin, T.B. & Reynolds, C. (Eds.). *Handbook of School Psychology (4th Ed.).* (Chapter 43, pp. 921-940). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

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Proctor, S. L., Harper, E. A., Powell, K., Collins, A. S., Huddleston, L., & Truscott, S. D. (August, 2008). *African American School Psychologists' Perceptions of Minority Recruitment and Retention in School Psychology Training.* Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Boston, MA.

Huddleston, L., Webb, K., Proctor, S. L., & Harper, E. A. (February, 2008). *Bridging the Gap: Faculty, Student, and Practitioner Mentorship Collaboration*. Paper presentation at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, New Orleans, LA.

Harper, E. A., Proctor, S. L., Collins, A. S., & Powell, K. H. (February, 2008). *Recruitment and Retention of African American School Psychologists: Practitioner Perspectives*. Paper presentation at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, New Orleans, LA.

Proctor, S. L., Harper, E., Collins, A. S., Powell, K., Huddleston, L., & Truscott, S. (August, 2007). *Emic Perspectives: A Study of African American School Psychologists' Professional Experiences*. Poster presentation at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA.

Proctor, S. L., Harper, E., Collins, A. S., Powell, K., Huddleston, L., & Truscott, S. (March, 2007). *African American School Psychologists' Training and Professional Experiences*. Paper presentation at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, NY, NY.

Proctor, S. L., Lopez, E., Saunders, A., Crockett, D., & Truscott, S. (March, 2006). *Toward an Empirical Base: A Call for Research on School Psychologists of Color*. Paper presented in Symposium, "Beginning a Problem-Solving Model to Facilitate Research on Racially and Linguistically Diverse School Psychologists," at the National Association of School Psychologists 2006 Annual Convention, Anaheim, CA.

ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM LEAVERS
by
Sherrie Lynn Proctor

This phenomenology used 21 in-depth interviews to explore seven African Americans' experiences at the school psychology programs they left. The purpose was to investigate what experiences contributed to participants' decisions to leave programs; if programs used retention strategies and if so, participants' view of the strategies; and what participants believe might have encouraged their retention. Findings indicate that misalignment between participants' career aims and their perceptions of school psychology practice as well as poor relationships with faculty and peers contributed to decisions to leave programs. Five participants reported that programs did not utilize retention strategies. Two reported that a sole faculty advocate served as a retention strategy, while one noted funding. Participants cited funding and advisement as strategies that might have encouraged their retention.

African American School Psychology Program Leavers

by

Sherrie Lynn Proctor

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
School Psychology
in
the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia
2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals have walked beside me along my journey to become a scholar, foremost my dissertation chair, Dr. Stephen Truscott. Steve, since day one you have believed in my ability to make a significant scholarly contribution to our profession, and over the past four and half years you have selflessly honored my pursuit of work that is meaningful to me as both an individual and a scholar. For your guidance, mentoring, and friendship, I will forever be grateful.

To my committee members: Drs. Greg Brack, Susan Crim McClendon, and Joel Meyers. Greg, you are a soldier for social justice. I appreciate you challenging me to "speak truth to power." I only hope I did my participants justice. Susan, your service on my committee is indicative of the space you create for scholars of color at this university. Thank you for sharing that space and your warmth with me. Joel, you have an amazing way of making students feel like they have something valuable to contribute even in the presence of your brilliance. Thank you for being so generous with your knowledge and encouraging my path as an academic.

To my participants, without you seven this dissertation would not have been possible. You shared your valuable time, life stories, and experiences with me. I thank you immensely and appreciate each of you.

To my dissertation research team: Kizzy Albritton, Tameka Jackson, and Jodi Sher. I could not have gotten through this project without you all. You each gave so much attention and care to this project. From the deepest place in my heart, I thank you.

To my sister-scholars: Emily Graybill, Erin Harper, and Lillie Huddleston. There is just something special about a graduate of a women's college. I cannot imagine making it to the end of this journey without each of you. Thank you for all of the support, love, and encouragement. I will be cheering you each on to the finish line.

To my inspiration: Dr. Mignonne Pollard. Thank you for showing me that anything is possible. Not by dreaming, but by doing. I love you more than words can express.

To my mom: Carolyn Proctor Johnson. Only now, as an adult and mother do I realize the magnitude of your strength. Thank you for all of the work you did to ensure that your girls could lead purposeful lives that extend beyond ourselves.

To my precious children: Bria and Brendan. Thank you for keeping me balanced, reminding me to laugh, and showering me with kisses when I need them most. I live each day fully because of you two.

To my husband: Robert Brown. I dedicate this dissertation to you. You have been my rock throughout my doctoral studies. Your excitement about seeing me grow into an academic has inspired me to persevere on days when I was sure I did not have anything left to give. I could not have completed this degree without your unwavering support. I love you. I love you. I love you. Now, it is your turn!

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ABBREVIATIONS

GPA	Grade Point Average
GRE	Graduate Record Examination
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
PWI	Predominantly White Institution

CHAPTER 1

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING AFRICAN AMERICANS INTO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMS

By 2042, people of color will comprise the majority of the United States; children of color will represent more than half of the country's childhood population (U.S. Census, 2008). This demographic shift is already evident in America's public schools where in 2006, 43% of students were identified as racial/ethnic minority group members (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). School psychology, however, is a majority White profession within which people of color's representation has been and remains "persistently low" (Fagan, 2004, p.427). This presents some concern because school psychologists are the primary providers of psychological services to children of color (Zhou et al., 2004). Consequently, it has been suggested that persistent and focused efforts are needed to increase diversity of school psychologists to more closely reflect the student population (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Meyers, Meyers, & Grogg, 2004; Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

Addressing shortages, pertaining to school psychologists of all races and ethnicities, was one impetus for the 2002 Invitational Conference on the Future of School Psychology (i.e.,"The Futures Conference") (Graves & Wright, 2007; Meyers et al., 2004) where participants identified and began tackling the profession's major challenges (Ehrhardt-Padgett, Hatzichristou, Kitson, & Meyers, 2004; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004). Participants acknowledged lack of racially/ethnically diverse school psychologists as a significant concern and recommended substantive problem

solving around this issue. However, recent data documenting the percentage of school psychologists of color do not indicate an increase in these professionals (Curtis, Lopez, Batsche, & Smith, 2006). This chapter presents a framework that demonstrates how school psychology programs can use the Three-Tiered Model for African American Student Recruitment and Retention in School Psychology Programs (Proctor et al., 2008) within an organizational consultation model (Meyers, Meyers, Proctor, & Graybill, 2009) to increase the number of racially/ethnically diverse school psychologists, specifically African Americans.

Demographics of School Psychology

Numerous researchers (e.g., Fisher, Jenkins, & Crumbley, 1986; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Meacham & Peckham, 1978; Thomas & Witte, 1996) have studied the demographics and professional practices of school psychologists. However, until the late 1980's, school psychology demographic and professional practices data were not collected systemically (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999). In 1989, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) began sponsoring surveys of their membership that occur every five years (Graden & Curtis, 1991; Curtis et al., 1999; Curtis, Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002; Curtis et al., 2006). Each NASP survey samples about twenty percent of the "Regular" NASP membership (i.e., persons who identify as school psychologists and work in a variety of settings) and collectively the surveys provide a mechanism for tracking demographic and professional trends over time. Trend analyses demonstrate that the gender of school psychology professionals has shifted, from primarily male up until the late 1980's to majority female presently. Across all surveys, 93% of respondents, on average, have

been White. Hispanics have shown the largest percentage increase for any ethnic minority group (i.e., from 1.5% during 1980-81 to 3.0% during 2004-05), while African American representation has ranged from 1.5% during the 1980-81 survey to 1.9% each survey thereafter (Graden & Curtis; Curtis et al., 1999; Curtis et al, 2002; Curtis et al., 2006).

There is some evidence, however, that the NASP surveys underestimate African American representation. Lewis, Truscott, and Volker (2008) found a higher percentage of African Americans (i.e., 5.6%) when they randomly cold-called public schools and asked to speak to the school psychologist. The demographics of their final sample were 88% White, 10% racial/ethnic minority, and 2 % "other." Findings suggested that racial/ethnic minority school psychologists are less likely, compared to their White colleagues, to be NASP members. The study is limited, though, by a small sample size (n=124) and points to the need for large scale demographic studies that reliably sample school psychologists who belong to NASP as well as those who do not.

The NASP surveys also provide limited representation of university faculty (6% of the 2004-05 participants were faculty) and do not include any student related data. Other researchers have documented racial/ethnic minority school psychology faculty percentages as ranging from 10% (Rogers, Hoffman, & Wade, 1998) to 17.5% (Zins & Halsell, 1986), while racial/ethnic minority graduate student percentages have ranged from 10.7% (McMaster, Reschly, & Peters, 1989) to 17% (Thomas, 1998). Generally, the faculty and student data are not disaggregated by race/ethnicity so it is difficult to track specific racial/ethnic groups' trends over time. Interestingly,

Curtis et al. (2004) observed that the increase in student racial/ethnic diversity school psychology graduate programs report is not transferring to the field – raising questions regarding the recruitment *as well as* the retention of people of color at both the training and practice levels.

Why Recruit and Retain Racially/Ethnically Diverse School Psychologists?

Political

Professional psychology organizations have aimed to address lack of racially/ ethnically diverse psychologists, possibly because inaction might lead to perceptions that the profession is complicit with its current homogeneity. All of the major professional psychology organizations (e.g., the American Psychological Association [APA], the National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology, NASP) have adopted position statements related to diversity. For example, NASP's position statement on minority recruitment recommends that: its members nominate talented minority students to school psychology programs and advocate for them throughout the application and admission process; programs use flexible admissions and training options, financial support, and active outreach as recruitment techniques; and research is used to explore effective recruitment strategies (NASP, 2003). Other efforts to address psychology's lack of diversity have included: major conferences dedicated to exploring ways to recruit and retain psychology students of color (Brown, 1997); APA, NASP, and state level organizations establishing scholarships to support racially/ethnically diverse students (APA, 2008; Crockett, 2007; Crockett, 2008); development of committees such as APA's Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention, and Training in Psychology (APA, 2008) and NASP's Task

Force on Minority Recruitment (Franco & Green, 2004); as well as language in APA's accreditation guidelines and NASP's training standards that encourage programs to recruit racially/ethnically diverse students and faculty (APA, 2002; NASP, 2000).

Social Justice

America's public schools have a history of inequitable service delivery to African American students (*Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education (1954); Hobson v. Hansen (1967, 1969);* Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Smith & Kozleski, 2005). African American students are two to three times more likely than their White peers to be identified as requiring special education (Moore, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008) and are more likely to be overrepresented in the "subjective" categories such as emotional disturbance versus "objective" categories such as visual impaired (Hosp & Reschly 2003; Skiba et al.). This is problematic because special education's efficacy for students in subjective categories is questionable (Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Hosp & Reschly, 2004), and the outcomes for students receiving special education are often not favorable generally (Shealey & Lue, 2006; NCES, 2008) and are even less favorable for African Americans (Countiho, Oswald, & Best, 2002).

Effective public education could potentially equalize opportunity for historically marginalized groups, like African Americans, as well as serve as a vehicle to social mobility (Baker, 2005; Smith & Kozleski, 2005). Yet, some suggest that the special education programs in which African Americans are overrepresented represent a separate and unequal educational experience (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Skiba et al., 2008) that contribute to continued racial and class inequities (Baker;

Skiba et al., 2006). School psychology impacts African Americans since practitioners' primary role remains conducting assessments that help determine special education eligibility and placement (Curtis et al., 2006). The social justice argument posits that groups affected by school psychology should be substantially involved in the profession. Increasing the number of African American school psychologists could bring new and important insights into solving some of the educational challenges facing African American students in today's schools (Proctor et al., under review).

Educators' Influence on Racial/Ethnic Minority Students

There is some evidence that the under representation of African American professionals in the educational workforce does not serve African American students well. Pigott and Cowen (2000) found that Black and White teachers both rate African American students as less capable and having more behavioral difficulties than Caucasian students, but Black teachers rate all children as more capable than do White teachers. Teacher expectations affect students' academic and behavioral performance (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Kesner, 2000; Moore, 2002) often creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Teacher expectancy effects have the strongest effect on minority and low SES students (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996). Furthermore, Hughes et al. (2005) found that African American students are more likely to experience less positive relationships with teachers, especially when teachers are non African American. Positive teacher-student relationships are protective factors against referral for special education (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007) which is important because once a

teacher refers a student for special education it is highly likely that the assessment procedures will confirm eligibility (Decker et al.; Harry, Klingner, Sturges, & Moore, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Knotek, 2003; O'Reilly, Northcraft, & Sabers, 1989).

Ladner and Hammons (2001) found that districts with greater proportions of Caucasian teachers had higher rates of African-American students in special education. In contrast, Serwatka, Deering, and Grant (1995) found a decrease in African American representation in emotionally handicapped (EH) classes as the percentage of African American teachers in a district increased. Yet, there is little empirical evidence about the interaction of school psychologists' race with special education classifications of students of color. Serwatka et al.'s study did explore whether percentages of African American school psychologists in districts predicted African American representation in EH classes. They found no significant relationship and noted that this finding might be explained by the fact that there were too few African American school psychologists employed to have any impact on overrepresentation. It does appear, though, that African American school psychologists are interested in the overrepresentation problem and some enter the profession to work specifically with African American children (Proctor et al., under review). Serwatka et al. suggested that having more African American educators involved in the referral and diagnostic process might help address African American overrepresentation in special education.

Cultural Competence

Changing population demographics require school psychologists to incorporate multicultural practices into their repertoire of skills (Ehrhardt-Padgett et

al., 2004; Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002; Rogers, Ponterotto, Conoley, & Wiese, 1992; Truscott & Truscott, 2005). There is evidence, however, that the profession is not adequately prepared to improve substantively the ability of the current workforce to meet these needs (Ortiz & Flanagan). Rogers et al. (1992) surveyed 121 school psychology program directors regarding their programs' multicultural practices and found that 40% of programs did not offer specific courses in minority issues or integrate multicultural content into existing courses. A decade later, graduate students enrolled in APA-accredited school psychology programs reported weaknesses in their training related to working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Kearns, Ford, & Brown, 2002). Scholars suggest that developing culturally competent school psychologists may be a daunting task since most school psychology professors do not have multicultural expertise (Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Truscott & Truscott).

Racial/ethnic differences between school psychologists and their clients do not deem school psychologists incapable of providing culturally responsive services (Brown, Shriberg, & Wang, 2007), nor does having school psychologists of the same race/ethnicity as clients ensure appropriate service delivery (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). However, increasing racial/ethnic diversity in graduate programs (both faculty and students) might benefit school psychology students and their future clients of color. For instance, Zhou et al. (2004) postulated that more faculty of color could help train culturally competent school psychologists; Miranda and Gutter (2002) noted that such individuals would be the most likely to study and write about diversity issues. The presence of faculty of color also improves programs' ability to attract graduate

students of color (Maton, Kohout, Wicherski, Leary, & Vinokurov, 2006; Rogers et al., 1992), leading, in turn, to increased opportunity for students to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships with diverse individuals while training. Experiences, such as these, that extend beyond theoretical learning provide the context for true understanding of multiculturalism and diversity (Barnett et al., 1995; Hill-Briggs, Evans, & Norman, 2004; Vasquez & Jones, 2006). Having racially/ethnically diverse program demographics also offers school psychology faculty an opportunity to monitor (and scaffold as needed) pre service school psychologists' affective and professional responses to issues regarding culture and diversity (Collins & Proctor, 2009). Clearly, from many perspectives, there is a need to recruit and retain a diverse group of school psychologists (Loe & Miranda, 2005). Below, is a review of studies that investigate ways to recruit and retain school psychology students of color.

Recruitment and Retention Studies in School Psychology

Recruitment

Only a few published studies address the recruitment and retention of students of color into school psychology graduate education. For example, Yoshida, Cancelli, Sowinski, and Bernhardt (1989) reviewed applied psychology program admissions materials to determine whether minority applicants received differential recruitment based on the type of program (121 clinical, 58 counseling, and 41 school programs) and fictitious applicants' race (i.e., Black, Hispanic, or White). They also asked six psychology undergraduate students (two Black, two Hispanic, and two White) to rate the admissions materials. Overall, Yoshida et al. found that programs treated

prospective minority applicants differently from White applicants and were twice as likely to respond to minority applicants. Black and Hispanic students rated admissions materials higher than White students, and materials from school psychology programs were rated highest in encouraging application to the programs, addressing the fictitious applicants' stated interest in community work, and acknowledging financial aid concerns.

To determine what specific application information lead to higher ratings from minority students, Ponterro, Burkard, Yoshida, and Cancelli (1995) identified four programs (two counseling and two school) that received high ratings in Yoshida et al. (1989). Twenty-two potential psychology doctoral program applicants from three minority groups rated the materials. The major findings were that high quality application materials, information about financial aid, specific program requirements, course descriptions, and student demographics were important to the prospective minority applicants. The students were also interested in information about admissions and application procedures, faculty demographics, faculty research related to diversity issues, and personal contacts by faculty members. The results of these studies are informative to school psychology faculty because admission materials are often the first contact between graduate programs and applicants (Bernal, Barron, & Leary, 1983).

More recently, Rogers and colleagues focused on the minority student recruitment practices of graduate psychology programs, including school psychology, known for exemplary multicultural practices (Rogers 2006; Rogers et al., 1998; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Each study employed semi-structured interviews with a

limited number (1 or 2) of faculty members and students associated with the surveyed programs. In all three studies, faculty member contact with minority applicants and targeted financial aid for minority students were reported as key recruitment strategies. Rogers and Molina (2006) also reported that the 11 sampled programs' recruitment strategies featured strong representation of faculty members and students of color, limited reliance on GRE scores, and links to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Retention

The aforementioned studies provide some insight regarding minority student recruitment strategies. However, it is just as important that the field retains minority students once they begin graduate study. This topic has received very little attention in the research. Hammond and Yung (1993) surveyed the minority-focused recruitment and retention practices used by 35 professional schools of psychology and found the most common reported retention strategies included specialized support groups, involvement with community support systems, social interaction with faculty members, group/individual counseling, and “buddy” programs.

Rogers et al. (1998) and Rogers and Molina (2006) reported that retention strategies employed by exemplary programs included assigning student mentors and exposing students to minority populations during assistantships and externships. Programs represented in Rogers and Molina also reported that important minority student retention strategies included having a critical mass of ethnic minority students, encouraging student involvement with faculty in diversity-related research, and offering at least one diversity course in the relevant department.

African American focused recruitment and retention research. In addition to the published literature on recruitment and retention of school psychology students of color, there are at least six studies (five unpublished and one published) centered on African-Americans. Brown (1997) surveyed 114 African-American school psychologists' retrospective ratings of recruitment and retention strategies in school psychology programs. Participants rated advertisement of lower costs, program proximity to home, and the availability of financial aid, respectively, as the three most important recruitment strategies. The presence of a minority faculty mentor, faculty accessibility, and problem-solving skills development were rated as the three most important retention strategies. Follow-up interviews suggested that participants viewed family obligations, lack of self-confidence, and financial expense as barriers to obtaining degrees.

Proctor (2000) examined 157 African American undergraduate students' ratings of the University of South Florida School Psychology Program's admission materials and factors important in their consideration of a graduate level psychology program. Treatment group participants reviewed the program's standard admission materials plus variations of additional information (e.g., personal biographies of the program's African American students and the "What is a School Psychologist?" brochure NASP publishes), while a control group viewed and rated the standard admission materials only. Participants in the treatment group assigned to review a combination of all materials rated the admission materials highest, although statistically significant differences were not found between treatment and control groups' ratings of the materials. Participants' perceptions of a culturally diverse

student body within the school psychology program and knowledge about school psychology did not differ significantly across conditions. Overall, participants rated financial support for minority students, degree offered, personal knowledge about the profession, accreditation by the APA, and approval by the NASP as five most important factors, respectively, in their consideration of a psychology graduate program. The findings suggest that including information about specific students of color who attend school psychology programs will not positively influence African Americans' perceptions of admissions material. However, school psychology programs' admissions material should present comprehensive descriptions of the program and profession.

Using qualitative methodology, Chandler (2007) investigated 44 Black students' and three Black faculty members' (at three HBCUs) beliefs about effective minority student recruitment and retention strategies in school psychology programs and their awareness of the school psychology profession. Major theme findings suggested that school psychology programs should offer financial support; connect to the Black community using minority focused research, Black-specific recruitment strategies, and intra-racial mentorship; and increase awareness about school psychology. Awareness activities should emphasize the need for Blacks in the field and begin in the high school years. Programs interested in retaining Black students should maintain a community atmosphere within the program whereby there is an acceptance and support of ethnic minority individuals.

Brown, Waite, and Bolen (2008) analyzed 31 African American undergraduate students' perceptions of and interest in school psychology before and

after a 25-minute school psychology career information presentation that served as the study's intervention. Thirty-one percent of participants reported being moderately interested to very interested in school psychology pre intervention, compared to 61% being very interested post intervention. Results also indicated that providing information to participants significantly changed their perceptions of job satisfactions received from a school psychology career. The researchers concluded that providing information to African American undergraduates might be an effective strategy for increasing African Americans' representation in school psychology.

Proctor et al. (2008) studied African American school psychology practitioners' experiences with and perceptions of recruitment and retention in school psychology graduate programs. A major theme of location indicated that participants were more likely to attend a school psychology programs located in close proximity to their preexisting residence. Exposure to a school psychology program prior to application and support being available within a program also played a role in participants' selection of graduate programs. Three major themes of raising awareness, recruit, and support emerged regarding what participants perceive the profession can do to increase African Americans in school psychology graduate programs. Along with raising awareness, participants believed school psychology programs should actively recruit African American students, particularly from HBCUs. Once enrolled in programs, participants noted that African Americans might benefit from support in the forms of funding (e.g., assistantships, grants, scholarships) and mentorship provided by both school psychologists of color and White school psychologists employed as practitioners and university professors. Based on their

findings, Proctor et al. developed a model for recruiting and retaining African American school psychology graduate students. This model is described later in this chapter.

Finally, Graves and Wright (2009) surveyed 165 students and 14 faculty members at three HBCUs to assess their knowledge of school psychology and views of various psychological disciplines. Results from two measures, *The Students Belief Questionnaire* and the *Faculty Beliefs Questionnaire*, found that 47% of students stated that working with children was very or somewhat important for choosing a graduate program, however, students perceived knowledge of school psychology was significantly lower than other psychology disciplines. Fifty-seven percent of faculty participants were not aware of the shortage of school psychologists. Furthermore, 64% of faculty indicated that school psychology programs do not actively recruit students from their university. Approximately 78% stated that NASP and APA do not adequately provide information about school psychology to their institution.

Factors Affecting African Americans' Entry into School Psychology

General Barriers

The literature delineates factors, both at the individual and institutional level, that affect African Americans' participation in higher education. Individual factors include such things as students' motivation and aspirations (Flowers, 2006; Pitre, 2006; Zhou et al., 2004), ability to afford higher education (Carter, 2006; Guiffrida, 2005; Seidman, 2005), social support networks (Carter; Guiffrida; Flowers), and level of academic preparation (Carter; Lewis et al., 2004; Seidman; Zhou et al.). For example, academic *under* preparation may present a significant barrier to higher

education for some African Americans. Lower income African Americans often attend under-funded public schools that offer limited and less rigorous courses delivered by underqualified and inexperienced teachers (Carter; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). These students are less likely than their middle and upper income counterparts to interact with college recruiters, visit college campuses, and gain basic information about college options (Freeman, 1997). Research documents that 71% of Black students are educated in high poverty schools (Wells & Frankenberg, 2007), suggesting that academic under preparation *as well as* limited access to college information may present challenges to higher education entry for many African Americans.

Jackson (1992) postulated that graduate psychology programs' failure to recruit minority students is due to few minorities in the educational pipeline generally. This may be true for African Americans/Blacks who represent only 16% of the total public population, but account for 27% of all high school drop outs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). As of 2007, only 36% of African Americans ages 18-24 had obtained a high school diploma; 30% had attended some college, but did not complete their degrees; and only 4.8% obtained bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census Bureau). Put another way, in 2007 only 182,000 African Americans earned college degrees.

Since obtaining a college degree is a prerequisite to entering psychology graduate programs, the statistics above are troublesome. It does appear, however, that of those African Americans who do attend college, many are likely to choose psychology as an undergraduate major (Maton et al., 2006). In 2003-04, psychology followed only business and the social sciences with conferring the largest percentage

of bachelor's degrees to Blacks (NCES, 2007). Data from 2003-2004, indicate that 6.8% of all psychology bachelor's degrees, 4.5% of psychology master's degrees, and 11.8% of psychology doctorates were awarded to Blacks (NCES). Maton et al. (2006) noted increasing percentages of African Americans obtaining psychology bachelor's and master's degrees from 1989-2002. For school psychology, however, African American student participation continues to remain low, with African Americans obtaining only 3.8% of the school psychology doctorates earned from accredited programs in 2005 (APA, 2005).

Specific Barriers

Lack of knowledge. One of the most basic inhibitors to African Americans' participation in school psychology might be their lack of knowledge about the profession. Curtis and Hunley (1994) investigated minority and non-minority undergraduate psychology majors' familiarity with school psychology and found that 63% of African American participants reported that they did not know enough about school psychology to choose it as a career. In Graves and Wright's (2009) study, students attending HBCUs had significantly lower knowledge of school psychology compared to other psychology disciplines. Chandler (2007) noted that faculty and students at HBCUs believed there is a need to increase awareness about school psychology. Similarly, half of the African American practitioners Proctor et al. (2008) interviewed underscored a need to raise African Americans' awareness regarding the profession. Brown et al.'s (2008) findings suggest that increasing African Americans' knowledge of school psychology might be an effective recruitment strategy.

Lack of recruitment efforts. HBCUs and other predominantly minority serving institutions are natural pathways to recruit African Americans (Proctor et al., 2008). HBCUs produce 40% of all African American college graduates in the United States; 75% of African Americans who eventually receive doctoral degrees are graduates of HBCUs (Graves & Wright, 2009). However, Graves and Wright (2009) found that 64% of HBCU faculty surveyed noted that school psychology programs do not actively recruit from their colleges and universities. Participants in Chandler (2007) indicated school psychology programs should actively recruit at Black high schools and colleges, while over one-third of Proctor et al.'s (2008) participants recommended recruitment at HBCUs.

Financial support. School psychology programs known for their exemplary multicultural training practices all report using targeted financial aid as a minority student recruitment strategy (Rogers et al., 1998; Rogers, 2006; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Zhou et al. (2004) suggested that efforts to increase minority students' acceptance of programs' offers of admission are improved substantially by awarding financial support via graduate research and teaching assistantships, grants, and contracts. Proctor et al. (2008) found, however, that only four of 30 African Americans they interviewed noted that financial support was the *most* important factor in their decision to attend a school psychology program. Thirty percent of Proctor et al.'s participants did not receive any funding at all, but persisted until degree completion. The role of financial support related to the persistence and success of African American graduate students is not clear (Gasman, Hirschfield, & Vultaggio, 2008), and is an area in need of further research.

As the above reviewed literature indicates, there are certainly areas in continued need of research to understand fully the reasons why there are so few African Americans in school psychology. However, recent culturally specific work (i.e., Proctor et al., 2008) has been done that can inform strategic efforts to recruit and retain African American school psychology students. Presented below is a model that results from Proctor et al.'s work. School psychology programs can use this model within organizational consultation to recruit and retain African American students.

A Conceptual Framework for Increasing African American Presence in School Psychology Programs

Three-Tiered Model for African American Student Recruitment and Retention in School Psychology Programs

Because there are factors that negatively affect African Americans' participation in school psychology, those within the profession must make conscientious and strategic efforts to recruit and retain school psychology graduate students of color (Chandler, 2007; Graves & Wright, 2009; Proctor et al., 2008). Yet, few (if any) research-based models exist for recruiting and retaining students of color into school psychology programs. There is research (although not presented as models) that describes strategies used by school psychology programs that recruit and retain students of color effectively (Rogers 2006; Rogers et al., 1998; Rogers & Molina, 2006). This research, however, does not examine recruitment and retention strategies based on graduate students' racial group membership. Such data are important to collect because recruitment and retention strategies might produce differential effects based on graduate students' race.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, several researchers (e.g., Chandler, 2007; Curtis & Hunley, 1994; Graves & Wright, 2009; Proctor, 2000) have investigated factors important to African American undergraduates when they are considering application to psychology graduate programs. However, important differences may exist between African American undergraduates who are *considering* school psychology graduate education versus African Americans who *actually* choose to attend school psychology programs (Proctor et al., 2008). For example, African American undergraduates in Curtis and Hunley (1994) ranked psychology graduate programs' location at the bottom of salient factors in their decisions to attend a program, whereas African American school psychology practitioners in Proctor et al. (2008) indicated school psychology programs' proximity to their homes as the most important factor. Thus, findings from prior studies may not be entirely applicable to the specific recruitment and retention of African Americans in regards to school psychology graduate programs.

A salient contribution of Proctor et al. (2008) is that the researchers sampled African American school psychology practitioners, individuals with significant insight into applying for, attending, and successfully matriculating through school psychology programs. Based on their participants' experiences and recommendations, Proctor et al. developed a research-based model for recruiting and retaining African Americans into school psychology programs. The Three-Tiered Model for African American Student Recruitment and Retention in School Psychology Programs (See Appendix A) illustrates that both universal and targeted strategies are needed to recruit and retain African Americans into school psychology

graduate education. The Three-Tiered Model is preliminary, but represents the first research-based model for recruiting and retaining African Americans into school psychology programs.

The base of the model (Tier 1) represents universal recruitment activities that professional organizations (e.g., state school psychology professional organizations, APA, NASP), school psychology graduate programs, and individuals can use. Tier 1 includes activities that raise awareness about the profession (e.g., NASP initiate a public relations campaign) and begin to establish connections with potential students (e.g., school psychologists participate in career days at K-12 schools and college career fairs). The second tier of the pyramid represents recruitment activities that individual school psychology programs can use. Examples include: recruiting African American students from within programs' local and regional area; recruiting African American students from within programs' home university; recruiting from HBCUs and other predominantly minority student serving educational institutions; providing assistantships, grants, scholarships, and targeted funding for students of color; and presenting about the job role and benefits of school psychology to undergraduate students. Finally, the third tier of the pyramid represents activities school psychology programs can use to promote the retention of African American students. Such things include providing funding, providing mentorship by both faculty and practitioners (specifically African American practitioners), and maintaining a supportive program environment.

Organizational Consultation Model

For school psychology programs interested in recruiting and retaining African American students, the use of the Three Tiered Model as part of organizational consultation can provide a guiding framework. Organizational consultation represents a promising way to aid in the recruitment and retention of African American school psychology students because it allows for intervention development based on the specific needs of individual school psychology programs. This model of organizational consultation (Meyers et al., 2009) may be particularly useful to programs since inherent to its design is attention to (a) content as well as process oriented issues and (b) providing consultation to all levels of an organization. The model's focus on content and process is salient since one threat to successful consultation is the tendency to focus on the proposed content of desired change without considering the processes required to bring about change (Meyers, 2002). Engaging in consultation at all levels (e.g., faculty, students, alumni, etc.) of a school psychology program is also important since stakeholders' involvement increases the chances that implemented interventions will be sustained once the consultation ends (Meyers, 2002; Harris, 2007; Knoff, 2000). A defining characteristic of the Meyers et al. model is that it delineates two essential types of organizational consultation: program-centered organizational consultation and consultee-centered organizational consultation.

Program-centered organizational consultation. The purpose of program-centered organizational consultation is to help an organization with a clearly defined component of its work (Meyers et al., 2009). For instance, a school psychology

program may require an organizational consultant's assistance with preparing grant applications, preparing for APA accreditation or NASP approval, setting up a research institute or center, recruiting and retaining students of color, etc. This type of consultation likely requires the consultant to have expertise related to the content of the consultation (Meyers et al.). Thus, consultants assisting school psychology programs in African American focused recruitment and retention strategies should have in depth knowledge of the recruitment and retention literature in psychology and school psychology, in particular. Knowledge acquired through the consultant's own research and practice experience may add to the consultant's credibility.

Consultee-centered organizational consultation. During consultee-centered organizational consultation, the consultant helps the organization address issues that are the basis of effective organizational functioning such as interpersonal relationships among members of the organization, group problem-solving strategies, as well as leadership strategies (Meyers et al., 2009). A consultant working with school psychology programs to develop African American focused recruitment and retention strategies should be competent using this approach to consultation even if she is initially brought in to provide program-centered organizational consultation since often topics related to race, class, gender, sexual preference are difficult to explore (Skiba et al., 2006; Tatum, 2007). For instance, some students and faculty might fundamentally disagree with admission preferences or special funding for one race/ethnicity over another even if they see the potential benefits of a racially/ethnically diverse program. However, addressing an issue like this during

consultation is a necessity because if ignored, hidden resentments might surface that create an unwelcoming environment for admitted African American students.

Key Principles of the Meyers et al. (2009) Organizational Consultation Model

Active engagement. Consistent with most other consultation models (e.g., Caplan, 1970; Curtis & Stollar, 1996; Meyers et al., 2004; Knoff, 2000), a key principle in Meyers et al.'s (2009) model is that individuals within the organization be actively engaged in the consultation process. Active engagement provides organization members an opportunity to participate in all aspects (e.g., contract negotiation, problem definition, problem analysis, intervention, evaluation) of the consultation and increases the likeliness of buy in (Meyers et al., 2009; Meyers, 2002). As such, stakeholders from all levels of the organization should be included in collaborative decision-making as part of the consultation (Curtis & Stollar; Knoff; Nastasi, Moore, & Varjas, 2004). Thus, school psychology programs utilizing this organizational consultation model to facilitate recruitment and retention of African American students should be sure to include stakeholders (e.g., college faculty and administrators, students, alumni) that represent both the school psychology program and its home university. Importantly, consultants should work to establish a non-hierarchical, collaborative relationship between members of the program and themselves as well as promote collaboration between others within the program (Meyers et al., 2009).

Effective interpersonal skills. To initiate, maintain, and encourage collaborative relationships, consultants must possess and model effective interpersonal skills such as "acceptance through nonjudgmental statements, openness,

nondefensiveness, and flexibility" (Kratochwill, 2008, p. 1673). Further, consultants must understand how systemic and political issues can affect interpersonal communication (Lopez & Truesdell, 2007; Meyers et al., 2009). Meyers (2002) presented an example of how an organizational consultation designed to help schools provide excellent education to low-income, African American students disintegrated at one school when a majority African American team of consultants were so concerned with the consultation's content that they overlooked the school's majority White staffs' feelings of "blame, inadequacy, and racism" (p. 169). Potentially, the consultants' use of effective interpersonal communication along with attention to political undertones at the school could have prevented the consultation's unfortunate outcome. Consultants working with school psychology programs to recruit and retain African American students must be (a) aware of political and racial undercurrents within the school psychology program, its department, and/ or home university and (b) equipped with the interpersonal skills to help stakeholders process any resulting issues. Consultants should be open to hearing the voices of those at the highest level of the organization, as well as those who represent marginalized groups (Meyers, Dowdy, & Paterson, 2000).

Culturally sensitive. Meyers (2002) also demonstrated the importance of consultants being aware of and sensitive to cultural dynamics within organizations. This is particularly relevant because as Truscott, Cosgrove, Meyers, and Eidle-Barkman (2000) noted, the norms, structures, and procedures of an organization will impose themselves on whatever intervention is attempted. Organizational consultants should become familiar with the setting culture prior to entry (Nastasi, Varjas,

Bernstein, & Jayasena, 2000) as well as work to understand cultural norms as part of the analytic process during consultation (Harris, 2007). For consultants working to increase African American students' recruitment and retention school psychology graduate programs, understanding issues such as the historical and current racial climate at a university as well as any future plans to address such issues may prove helpful. Further, consultants should investigate cultural norms within the program as well as within the greater university since administrators (e.g., department chairpersons, deans, and presidents) can have specific ways, unique to the culture of their university, of denoting what initiatives are important and supported.

Recursive. Fundamental to the Meyers et al. (2009) model is the understanding that organizational consultation is a recursive process, meaning that decisions made during consultation can be adapted, modified, or dismissed based on ongoing data collection. Creating a data feedback loop (i.e., collect data, analyze it, and share with members of the organization) until group consensus is reached helps with problem identification, setting goals, and designing interventions (Meyers et al; Nastasi et al., 2004). Recursive methodology allows problems that could interfere with the organizational consultation to be addressed as they arise (Meyers et al.) and acknowledges that people and conditions within organizations are dynamic (Nastasi et al.).

Implementation

Internal or external consultant?: Prior to engaging in organizational consultation, school psychology programs' stakeholders will need to decide if they will use an internal or external consultant. There are potential advantages to having

an internal consultant (e.g., familiarity with the organization's norms, procedures, and culture; previously developed trusting relationships with members of the organization, ready access to key players in the organization, may have a vested interest in consultation's outcome, and can provide follow-up services) (Meyers et al., 2009). However, internal consultants may also experience difficulties related to dual roles or conflicts of interests. Those within school psychology programs who serve as consultants to address African American recruitment and retention efforts may find it difficult to navigate process issues like heated disagreements among members of the program related to race/ethnicity focused issues. It is also less likely that an internal consultant would have the content expertise related to students of color recruitment and retention in psychology since only a handful of scholars have researched this area.

While external consultants may not have the advantages noted for internal consultants, external consultants typically do not have to deal with conflict of interests or dual roles and can, therefore, attend exclusively to the consultation. These consultants may have to spend additional time learning the organization's culture, norms, and procedures, as well as building rapport and establishing trust with organization members. School psychology programs interested in organizational consultation focused on African American student recruitment and retention will benefit from a consultant who possesses relevant content knowledge and can, if required, help facilitate challenges related to the program's effective functioning (i.e., leadership, communication, interpersonal relationships).

Stages of Organizational Consultation

There are seven stages to the Meyers et al. (2009) organizational consultation model: entry, problem definition, problem analysis, intervention development, intervention implementation, and evaluation. Below, each stage of the model (along with key activities associated with each stage) is described. Additionally, where appropriate, examples of how the Three-Tiered Model can be used within the organizational consultation to aid in recruiting African American students are presented.

Entry. Typically, prior to consultants' entry into an organization, a member of the organization perceives that the organization has a problem that organizational resources alone cannot handle (Schein, 1988). Organization members, at this point, must decide if they should request the assistance of an internal or external consultant. For school psychology programs interested in recruiting and retaining African American students this is a particularly important consideration given that underlying (and potentially uncomfortable) process issues might arise due to the proposed consultation's specific content. However, whether an internal or external consultant is selected a key aspect of the entry phase is contract negotiation (Meyers, 2002). Contract negotiation is when the consultant and members of an organization negotiate specific aspects of the consultation such as its focus, general services to be performed, participants' as well as consultants' expectations, and fee structure (Schein). Whether contract negotiation takes place in writing or verbally, clear expectations should be set during the entry phase because unclear expectations (on the part of the consultant or program stakeholders) can result in a failed consultation

(Meyers). To facilitate contract negotiation, Schein (1998) recommended that consultants set up and attend an exploratory meeting with the organization to assess: (1) what exactly the problem is, (2) if he or she will be helpful to the organization, (3) if the problem is of interest to him or her, and (4) future action steps. Finally, including all relevant stakeholders during contract negotiation is a recommended since this sets the stage for participants' active engagement throughout the consultation (Meyers et al., 2009).

Problem definition. Sometimes problem definition occurs during the entry phase, but it is likely that the work required to develop a clear and specific definition of the problem (i.e., operational definition) will extend beyond the entry stage (Meyers et al., 2009). The development of an operational problem definition can be facilitated by having relevant stakeholders complete a needs assessment (Knoff, 2000; Meyers et al.; Truscott et al., 2000). Such an assessment helps the consultant and organization to develop a clearer understanding of the presenting problem(s). Surveys, individual and/or group interviews, observation, and review of records are useful ways to gather needs assessment data. Consultants should be sure to feed the results of needs assessments back to stakeholders. It is also important that both the consultant and program stakeholders understand that problem definition is a continuous process based on ongoing data collection and analysis. It is likely, therefore, that the initial definition of the problem will be modified as the consultation progresses (Meyers et al.).

Problem analysis. Once school psychology program stakeholders and the consultant identify a specific problem related to recruiting or retaining African

American students, then they must investigate, “Why is this happening?” (Ervin & Schaughency, 2008, p. 867). Hypothetically, a school psychology program might identify the fact that only one (4%) of their 25 specialist degree seeking students is African American as a problem. This presents as a problem since the program desires a racially diverse student population and would like to have at least one-fourth of their student population African American. The consultant’s task then is to collect data that will help stakeholders understand variables that contribute to the identified problem. Using the hypothetical, problem analysis data (which could include interviews with students, faculty, alumni, and potential applicants) might reveal two variables that relate to the program having difficulty recruiting African Americans: 1) African Americans’ lack of knowledge about the profession and 2) the location of the school psychology program being in a predominantly White geographic location. Once the consultant feeds this information back to the program stakeholders (to ensure that he or she has interpreted the data correctly), these data can provide direction for intervention development.

Intervention development. During this stage, the consultant’s expertise regarding the school psychology recruitment and retention literature is a valued contribution to the consultation. Yet, while the consultant possesses the relevant content knowledge, it is important that stakeholders also contribute to intervention development since stakeholders’ involvement increases the chances of sustaining change once the consultation ends (Meyers, 2002). Referencing Tier 2 of the Three-Tiered Model, the consultant and stakeholders might reach consensus regarding which of the seven recommendations offered are most applicable to addressing the

variables (related to the program's difficulty recruiting African American students) uncovered during the problem analysis phase. When selecting interventions, consultants and stakeholders must consider the feasibility of the intervention regarding (a) the time it will take to implement, (b) money required to initiate and sustain it, and (c) the human resources required to initiate and sustain it. In the hypothetical, the consultant and program stakeholders might agree to implement two interventions: one focused on increasing African Americans' awareness of school psychology (e.g., presenting about the job role and benefits of school psychology to undergraduate students) and the other focused on recruiting from HBCUs or other predominantly minority serving universities.

Intervention implementation. Once the consultant and program stakeholders reach consensus regarding which interventions to implement, then the school psychology program must dedicate ample resources to ensure the interventions have the greatest chance for success. Harris (2007) recommended that each intervention be evaluated to determine what resources are needed. For the hypothetical, current school psychology graduate students, faculty, and program alumni could serve as resources to present career information sessions to undergraduate students (particularly African American students) at the school psychology program's home university and other nearby colleges. Human resources (faculty and current graduate students) in addition to financial resources (e.g., travel expenses) might be required to recruit students from HBCUs and other predominantly minority serving universities. Prior to implementing any intervention, however, school psychology programs should develop action plans that specify what activity

needs to take place, who is responsible for carrying out the activity, by what date the activity needs to occur, and who will follow-up to ensure that the activity is accomplished (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). Such action plans ensure that individuals implement agreed upon interventions with integrity or as intended (Nastasi et al., 2004). It is important, however, for action plans to include procedures to provide support for individuals who may require assistance carrying out specific activities (Harris, 2007). Furthermore, continuous data collection should occur throughout the intervention implementation phase to monitor progress towards the consultation's outcome goals. Nastasi et al. (2004) noted that "essential changes" (progress towards outcome goals) can be judged by comparing intervention data at any point in time to the desired intervention outcome (p.68). Thus, the consultant in the hypothetical would note essential changes as the school psychology program's percentage of African American students increases from 4% (percentage of African American students at the start of the intervention) to 25% (program's desired goal).

Evaluation. Evaluation is an important component of consultation (Harris, 2007). Along with evaluating an intervention's integrity, consultants should assess its efficacy, acceptability, and social validity (Meyers et al., 2009). Efficacy refers to how effective the intervention is at addressing the defined problem (s). Given the barriers to African Americans' participation in school psychology, it is likely that programs implementing African American student focused recruitment strategies will observe essential changes gradually over the course of many years. Therefore, intervention effectiveness should not be assumed inadequate when immediate increases (i.e., within one to two years) in African Americans' application and

acceptance to school psychology programs are not observed. Annual program records reviews that detail the number of African Americans who apply, enter, and graduate from a school psychology program can help determine if essential changes are occurring, or if there is a need for intervention modification. Other data gathering methods such as interviews (conducted by someone not associated with the program) or surveys (with option for anonymity) are useful to assess the social validity of implemented interventions. Social validity is the extent to which the intervention's goals and activities are consistent with stakeholders' values (Nastasi et al., 2004). Assessing the social validity of school psychology programs' efforts to recruit and retain African American students may be particularly important since key stakeholders (e.g., students and sometimes faculty) cycle in and out of the environment. Finally, acceptability speaks to the extent to which stakeholders view the intervention as necessary and appropriate (Nastasi et al.). Acceptability can be a measured using interviews, self-report surveys, or informal communications (Nastasi et al.). For consultants working with school psychology programs, it is important to assess the acceptability of interventions focused on recruiting and retaining African American students because if stakeholders do not view intervention as necessary and appropriate, it is unlikely that they will sustain the intervention once the consultation ends. Finally, all evaluations discussed should take place pre, during, and post intervention.

Table 1 presents a visual of the seven stages of Meyers et al. (2009) organizational consultation model. This table also provides as visual of key tasks that

should be addressed at each consultation stage and provides references for readers interested in learning more about key tasks.

Directions for the Future and Conclusion

Research and Practice Agenda

This chapter points to several avenues to for future research and practice related to recruiting and retaining African Americans into school psychology programs. First, it is important to note that the framework (i.e., use of the Three-Tiered Model within organizational consultation) presented in this chapter is conceptual and has not been tested empirically. School psychology programs that implement the proposed framework might use action research methods (i.e., conduct research related to the model while simultaneously implementing it) to investigate various components (e.g., its acceptability, feasibility, and efficacy) of the model. Since no other African American student focused recruitment and retention model is present in the literature, it is important for programs that choose to use this framework report data related to its outcomes.

Because much of the consultation literature investigates the content (versus process) of consultation (Meyers et al., 2009), it might be particularly interesting to study the stages of organizational consultation related to the proposed framework for recruiting and retaining African American students. For instance, research might investigate the impact of having an internal versus external consultant on the different stages of an organizational consultation focused on increasing African Americans' recruitment and retention in school psychology graduate programs. Information such

as this might be useful since graduate programs often operate on limited funds and might not be able to afford an external consultant.

Finally, although the Three-Tiered Model presented was developed based on the experiences and recommendations of 30 African American school psychologists, further validation of the model using current African American school psychology graduate students would add to its strength. Furthermore, future researchers might employ larger scale quantitative studies to explore issues related to the recruitment and retention of African Americans in school psychology programs. Given the increased student diversity in America's public schools, it is imperative that school psychology programs use targeted and empirically supported efforts to recruit and retain more African American graduate students. While this chapter presents direction for both practice and research, the author hopes that substantial increases (in the future) in African Americans' presence in school psychology will eliminate the need for a chapter such as this.

Table 1

Stages of Organizational Consultation, Key Tasks, and References

Stage	Key Tasks	References
Entry	• Contract Negotiation • Problem Definition • Understand Program Culture • Data Feedback Loop	Meyers (2002); Schein (1998) Natasi, Varjas, Bernstein & Jaysena (2000).
Problem Definition	• Needs Assessment • Operational Definition • Data Feedback Loop	Knoff (2000) Trustcott, Cosgrove, Meyers, & Eidle-Barkman (2000)

	• On-going Process	
Problem Analysis	• Data Feedback Loop	Natasi, Moore, & Varjas (2004); Harris (2007)
Implementation	• Data Feedback Loop • Use existing empirical data to guide intervention direction • Develop culture specific interventions	Chandler (2007) Proctor, Truscott, Harper, Collins, Powell & Huddleston (2008) Nastasi et al. (2000)
Evaluation	• Data Feedback Loop • Evaluate integrity and acceptability	Truscott et al. (2000)

*Include all stakeholders during each stage of organizational consultation.

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CHAPTER 2

AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM LEAVERS

Introduction

By 2042, people of color will comprise the majority of the United States; children of color will represent more than half of the country's childhood population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). This demographic shift is already evident in America's public schools where in 2006, 43% of students were identified as racial/ethnic minority group members (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). School psychology, however, is a majority White profession wherein people of color's representation has been and remains "persistently low" (Fagan, 2004, p. 427). African Americans, in particular, make up only 1.9% of school psychologists (Curtis, Lopez, Batsche, & Smith, 2006) compared to 16% of public school students who identify as Black/African American (NCES). Lack of racial/ethnic diversity within school psychology presents concern because school psychologists are the primary providers of psychological services to children of color (Zhou et al., 2004). Consequently, some have suggested that persistent and focused efforts should be made toward making school psychologists more reflective of the student population (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Meyers, Meyers, & Grogg, 2004; Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

Due to concerns about lack of diversity within school psychology, Ehrnhardt-Padgett, Hatzichristou, Kitson, and Meyers (2004) suggested that the profession investigate the attrition patterns of school psychology students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Given the low percentage of African American school psychologists

and the identified need to investigate attrition in school psychology graduate education, the current study focuses on attrition among African Americans in school psychology graduate programs. The following discussion provides a review of the literature elucidating factors that contribute to graduate students' attrition from graduate education.

Student attrition from graduate education has been a concern for decades (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Such attrition is problematic due to the economic (e.g., expenses related to relocation for some students to attend programs, funding provided to students, recruitment efforts the university expends) and psychosocial (e.g., leaving can cause students frustration and depression, faculty time and effort is wasted) costs to the student and the university (Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005). Because there is not a national database that tracks graduate school attrition (Lovitts & Nelson), it is difficult to know student attrition rates at different graduate degree levels (i.e., masters, specialist). There are estimates, however, that approximately 50% of those who enter doctoral programs do not persist to degree completion (Lovitts, 2001).

Most research on graduate student attrition is quantitative and uses individual student characteristics (e.g. Graduate Record Examination [GRE] scores, undergraduate grade point average [GPA], race, gender, age) to predict which students are more likely to complete degrees (Golde, 1994; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Findings consistently indicate that undergraduate GPA is not related to graduate attrition rates, and general GRE scores inconsistently predict attrition (Bair & Haworth, 1999). Findings also document that White students have lower attrition rates than students of color and men have lower attrition rates than women (Golde).

Consequently, researchers recommend that graduate attrition studies move away from examining student level characteristics and towards a qualitative understanding of the environmental forces that potentially influence graduate students' attrition (Lovitts, 2001).

Bair and Haworth (1999) made a significant contribution to the graduate student attrition literature with a metasynthesis of 118 doctoral student persistence and attrition studies conducted between 1970 and 1998. This metasynthesis include both quantitative and qualitative studies and delineates across study themes related to attrition. Student attrition rates varied by discipline, with the highest rates in the social sciences and humanities, and the lowest in the natural sciences. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is funding. For instance, compared to students in the sciences, a lower percentage of education students received financial assistance, which Bair and Haworth conclude contributes to education students' higher attrition rate. Education students often worked off campus and received only partial funding. Students who worked off campus and/or held positions not related to their research were more likely not to complete their degrees. Additionally, students who did not have strong, positive relationships with their advisor or faculty were also more likely to leave programs. While not as important as faculty relationships, peer relationships also contributed to graduate student attrition. Leavers were less likely to be involved with their academic peers than those who completed degrees. Generally, graduate students who were not involved in program, department, institutional, and professional activities were more likely to leave graduate programs. Finally, for

advanced doctoral students, difficulty related to the dissertation process contributed to their attrition.

Lovitts (2001) surveyed 816 doctoral students (511 completers and 305 noncompleters) who entered two research universities from 1982 to 1984. Participants came from nine departments (math, biology, chemistry, sociology, economics, psychology, English, history, and music). Lovitts sent each participant a detailed questionnaire and conducted one-hour telephone interviews with two noncompleters from each department. The questionnaire and telephone interviews explored why students leave programs without finishing their degrees. Findings suggest that students who persisted and those who left programs were equally academically qualified. There was a positive correlation between integration into a department's social and professional life (i.e., becoming a part of the community) and successful completion of the doctoral degree. Students' lack of socialization into their department most heavily contributed to their departure. Students who received no financial support were the most at risk of withdrawing from programs, as well as those on full fellowships because they were less likely to have an on campus office, which led to their increased isolation. Lovitts noted that teaching or research assistantships helped students connect and create relationships with faculty. The single most important factor in students' decisions to continue or withdraw was their relationship with a faculty adviser.

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) conducted a study that has important implications for school psychology graduate education attrition given its focus on a closely related profession, counselor education. These researchers used qualitative

interviews to investigate factors that influenced 33 doctoral students' persistence or attrition at 17 different counselor education programs. The sample included 10 individuals who left counselor education programs prior to degree completion. Findings suggested that student-program match accounted for participants' decisions to leave or persist to degree completion. Student-program match consisted of two components: academic match and social-personal match. Academic match occurred when students perceived that programs' focus and curriculum was preparing them for what they wanted to do professionally. Leavers experienced academic mismatch or incongruence "between what they wanted from the program and what they thought the program was preparing them to do" (p.183). Social-personal match refers to participants' relationships, or connection, with their program faculty and peers. In contrast, social-personal mismatch describes participants' lack of connection with program faculty and peers and this contributed to their decisions to leave. This study's findings mirror those of Bair and Haworth (1999) regarding graduate students' program relationships- positive relationships with peers are important, but positive relationships with faculty are of even greater importance for preventing attrition.

The reviewed attrition studies provide significant insight into reasons graduate students choose to leave programs. However, the studies do not provide information about graduate students' experiences based on their racial group membership. This type of information might be useful in understanding if race interacts with the factors identified as contributing to graduate student attrition.

Few studies directly investigate African Americans' attrition from graduate school. However, studies do explore factors related to African Americans' participation and retention in graduate education. These studies typically sample African American doctoral graduates and/or current African American graduate students (e.g., Ellis, 2001; Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008; Hunn, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005). Consistent findings across this literature suggest that African American graduate students experience difficulty socially and academically integrating into their programs (Gasman et al.; Hunn; Johnson-Bailey; Williams et al.). For instance, African American masters and doctoral students in Gasman et al. (2008) reported that peer relationships were important to them, but most had "cordial, yet for the most part not very close" relationships with their White peers (p. 134). As a result, Gasman et al. noted that their participants looked for peer support on their own since institutional supports were not available to help them establish such relationships. Participants in Williams et al. (2005) reported feeling like outsiders to their academic community and perceived a need to prove their intelligence to White peers and professors. Johnson-Bailey's (2004) participants also experienced academic and social alienation from White peers. Similar to participants in other studies (i.e., Ellis; Hunn; Williams et al.), Johnson-Bailey's participants turned to African American graduate school peers and African American faculty, when present, for support and mentorship.

Another consistent finding in this literature is that African American students have challenges obtaining mentoring and advising (Ellis, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008). This is particularly problematic since the attrition literature emphasizes the critical

importance of graduate students developing positive relationships with their advisors in order to persist to degree completion (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). While Gasman et al.'s (2008) participants did note both positive and negative experiences with advisors, those who experienced negative relationships reported lowered self-esteem and thoughts about leaving their programs. The literature documents that a major factor in the retention of African American graduate students is the presence of supportive Black professors (Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Hunn, 2008). While both Johnson-Bailey (2004) and Hunn's (2008) participants acknowledged the benefits of African American faculty, they also expressed appreciation for culturally sensitive White professors with whom they established relationships. One participant in Johnson- Bailey's study expressed that academia is set up as a game, and she did not know the rules. Mentoring and advising helps African American graduate students learn how to play the academic game (Johnson-Bailey).

While not as prevalent as the need for positive relationships with faculty and peers, the literature also supports African Americans' need for funding to persist in graduate school (e.g., Gasman et al., 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Gasman et al.'s (2008) participants reported working several jobs, taking out loans, and experiencing inability to concentrate because of financial stress. These participants also noted that limited funds prevented their ability to socialize professionally and attend professional conferences. Johnson-Bailey (2004) reported that none of her ten participants entered their graduate programs with financial support; four described financial struggles that resulted in them taking course overloads to save money on

tuition, developing health problems, and considering leaving their programs. Still, funding emerges only as a minor theme in the overall literature related to African Americans' graduate education experiences (Gasman et al.).

Purpose of the Study

The research reviewed identifies salient factors in graduate student attrition and African American students' graduate school experiences across a variety of disciplines. However, no study explores the experiences of school psychology graduate students of color and attrition among these students. Given the need for diverse school psychologists (Lopez & Rogers, 2007; Truscott & Truscott, 2005), students of color who attrite from school psychology programs are an important population to investigate. The current study seeks to understand the reasons African Americans, in particular, choose to leave school psychology programs. The study's purpose is threefold: (1) to explore what experiences contributed to participants' decisions to leave school psychology programs; (2) to determine if school psychology programs used retention strategies, and if so, what are participants' perceptions of those strategies; and (3) to investigate what strategies participants believe might have encouraged their retention in programs.

Method

Research Design

Phenomenological research methods (i.e., Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006) guided the design and implementation of this study, as well as the analysis of its results. Creswell (2007) noted that the purpose of a phenomenology is to describe the meaning of a phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have

experienced it, giving careful attention to uncovering what the shared understanding of the phenomenon is across individuals. Hoyt and Bhati (2007) observed that phenomenological inquiry is particularly relevant for investigations of rare or rarely researched populations. For the current study, the phenomenon under investigation was African Americans who left school psychology programs prior to obtaining a professional entry-level degree (i.e., specialist or its equivalent). A three series interview format was used (Seidman). Specifically, a first interview focused on participants' life history, a second interview focused on their experiences related to their decisions to leave school psychology programs, and a third interview explored how participants made meaning of their decisions to leave their school psychology graduate programs. The study's design was recursive since modifications were made based on on-going data analysis and participant feedback (Nastasi, Moore, & Varjas, 2004). For example, as the study progressed several questions were added to the interview protocol based on an analysis of data obtained in preceding interviews (Nastasi et al.; Seidman). Finally, a constructivist framework was used because there is a paucity of research on African Americans' attrition from school psychology graduate education. Participants, via sharing their lived experiences, and the primary researcher, through careful listening, thoughtful explorations, and appropriate follow ups (Seidman) constructed knowledge regarding the graduate education experiences of African Americans who chose to leave school psychology programs.

Participants

Participants included seven African Americans who left school psychology programs prior to receiving a professional entry-level degree. The number of

participants is consistent with Dukes' (1984) recommendation that phenomenological studies include interviews with three to 10 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were recruited using network sampling which involves "identifying participants or cases of interests from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). This sampling technique facilitates identification of individuals, like education leavers, who are difficult to access (Creswell, 2007). To begin this study's network sampling, the principal researcher sent study recruitment emails to professional contacts and school psychology related listserves (e.g., National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) African American On-Line Community, NASP Facebook page, etc.). These emails described the study's purpose, provided the primary researcher's contact information, and asked individuals to contact the primary researcher if they met the study's criteria and were interested in participating. The email also asked individuals to forward the recruitment email on to other relevant listserves and anyone they believed fit the study's criteria. Seven individuals contacted the primary researcher, and expressed interest in participating. Each individual who contacted the primary researcher met inclusion criteria which required that participants: (1) self-identified as African American, (2) entered a school psychology program for a specialist (or its equivalent) or doctoral degree, (3) attended the program for at least one full semester, (4) left the program without obtaining an entry level degree, and (5) entered (and left) a school psychology program between 1990 and 2008.

The sample included six females and one male, all of whom self-identified as African American. The age range was 25 to 40 (*M* = 34.5; *SD* = 5.19). Five participants attended undergraduate at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), while two attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Participants attended six different school psychology programs. Two participants attended the same school psychology program (one attended from 2001-2003 and the other attended from 2006-2007). Three participants entered programs seeking a doctorate, while four were pursuing a specialist degree. Time spent attending school psychology programs ranged from one to three years (*M* = 1.5; SD = .78). The average time that had passed since participants left their school programs was 10.7 years, with a range from two to 16. At the time of the study, all participants had successfully completed at least a Masters Degree at programs other than the school psychology programs they left (two in school psychology and five in other disciplines). Two participants had completed doctorates, while two others were doctoral candidates. Table 2 presents demographics about the programs participants' left, years participants attended the programs, and participants' current professional status.

Table 2

Program Demographics, Years Attended, and Professional Status

Participant Pseudonym	Program Characteristics	Years Attended	Other Students of Color in Cohort	Current Occupation
Amel	Large, Public Southeastern	2006-2007	2 African American Females	Assistant Director of Student Affairs

Kendall	Large, Private, Northeastern	1996-1997	1 Asian Female	Clinical Psychologist
Kevin	Small, Public Southeastern	1991-1993	None	Professor
Lisa	Midsized, Public, Southeastern	1992-1993	None	School Psychologist
Michelle	Large, Public Southeastern	2001-2003	None	School Psychologist Doctoral Intern
Nia	Large, Public, Southeastern	1997-2000	1 Black International Male	Doctoral Candidate
Shonda	Large, Public Midwestern	1995-1996	1 Black Male	Entrepreneur

Procedure

In December 2008, the primary researcher sent previously described recruitment emails to professional contacts and school psychology professional organization's listserves. Follow up emails with this same information were sent a week after the initial emails. Over the following two weeks, seven individuals contacted the primary researcher via email and expressed interest in participating. The primary researcher responded to these potential participants and requested their telephone contact information. She then called them to ascertain if they met study inclusion criteria and to gather initial demographic information (see Appendix B). Approximately a week later, the primary researcher sent an email to each of these individuals informing them that they met study inclusion criteria and inviting their participation. All seven agreed to participate. The primary researcher and participants then set up interview schedules via email. Three individuals resided outside of the primary researchers' city of residence. A grant that supported this

research covered the cost of transportation for these three individuals to travel to the primary researcher's city to participate in this study.

The primary researcher conducted interviews from January 2009 to May 2009. Each participant engaged with the primary researcher in three face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview to validate the study's findings. The face-to-face interviews were spaced three days to a week apart, which allowed time for participants to process preceding interviews without losing the connection between interviews (Seidman, 2006). Such spacing also allowed time for the primary researcher and research team members to review completed interviews and determine if additional questions should be added to the interview protocol or if the primary researcher needed to ask follow up questions related to a participant's preceding interview(s). The first participant's three interviews served as this study's pilot to test if the interview design and primary researcher's interviewing techniques elicited the depth and quality of information needed to meet the study's purpose. The interviews from this first participant yielded rich data. Given the difficulty accessing this study's target population, the primary researcher decided to include this participant's data in the reported results. Member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which involved sending each participant his or her three transcribed interviews and a major and minor themes summary document occurred in June 2009. The primary researcher asked participants to review the documents and provide feedback indicating if the transcripts and major and minor themes document represented their experiences. All participants responded and expressed that the information in the documents accurately reflected their experiences. Furthermore, during a fourth and

final telephone interview with each participant (these occurred in August 2009) the primary researcher shared the study's textural and structural descriptions as well as the conclusions. The primary researcher asked participants to provide feedback regarding whether the descriptions and conclusions presented represented their experiences. All participants indicated that the findings and interpretation of the findings represented their experiences.

Instruments

Demographic sheet. During an initial telephone contact, a screening sheet was used to collect demographic information from participants to ensure that they met study inclusion criteria. The demographic sheet requested the following information: gender, age, current state of residence, school psychology program attended, degree program (e.g., Masters, Masters +60, Specialist, Doctorate) participant entered the program under, length of time in program, degree obtained from program, and reason for leaving the program. See Appendix B.

Interview protocol. The interview protocol was developed based on Seidman's (2006) three series model for conducting phenomenological interview studies (i.e., focused life history interview, experience with phenomenon interview, and meaning making interview) (See Appendix C). Interview explorations were open ended and focused on participants' life history (e.g., Tell me about your life up until entering the school psychology program you left.), their experiences in the school psychology programs they left (e.g., Tell me about your experience in the school psychology program you left.), and how they have made meaning of their experiences (e.g., Now that you have talked about being a student in the school psychology

program you left, what does that mean to you?). Follow up explorations for the first interview were developed based on the school psychology recruitment literature (e.g., Rogers & Molina, 2006; Proctor et al., under review) and focused on understanding how participants chose school psychology (e.g., Were there any educational experiences that influenced your decision to enter school psychology?). Follow up explorations for the second interview were developed based on research related to African American students' graduate education experiences as well as the graduate student attrition literature (e.g., Tell me about your academic experiences in the program you left.; Tell me about your decision to leave that school psychology program and any experiences that encouraged your decision to leave.) Follow up explorations for the third interview focused on understanding how participants made meaning of their decisions to leave programs and their current thoughts about school psychology (e.g., What meaning do you make out of your decision to leave the program?; How do you currently view the profession of school psychology?). Interview protocol modifications included adding several questions and a prompt to the beginning of the second and third interviews that asked participants if they had any additional thoughts related to their prior interview before proceeding with the scheduled interview. In sum, the primary researcher spent approximately four hours with each participant

Research Team

The research team consisted of a one White, male faculty member who served as the primary researcher's dissertation chairperson and faculty advisor, one White specialist level school psychology student, one African American doctoral level

school psychology student, one African American counseling psychology doctoral candidate, and the primary researcher- a school psychology doctoral candidate.

The primary researcher conducted all interviews. The sole use of the primary researcher as the interviewer was purposeful and designed to maximize consistency throughout the interview process. Furthermore, some assert that when discussing racially sensitive topics, research participants might feel freer to express their authentic voices when speaking with a same race researcher (Seidman, 2006). The primary researcher is a 35 year old, African American woman who previously practiced as a specialist-level school psychologist. Her interest in African Americans' experiences in school psychology began while she was pursuing a specialist degree and became concerned about the limited number of African Americans in her program. She acknowledges that her experiences and worldview influence the research process, and, in fact, influence the research questions she posed (Creswell, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Her biases include a belief that African Americans are needed in school psychology and that school psychology programs do not do enough to recruit and retain African American students.

The research team helped minimize the effect of the primary researcher's biases on the research. Research team meetings served to review the interview data and provide feedback relative to the interviewing, methodology, and data analysis processes. We used peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to continuously discuss and challenge the researchers' biases. The diversity represented by research team members also added different, and at times, convergent viewpoints to the research process that aided in challenging members' biases.

Data Analysis

This study's data were analyzed using phenomenological data analysis techniques (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The steps involved in data analysis included preparing the data for analysis, developing a holistic understanding of the data, horizonalizing the data, developing meaning units and themes, and composing textural and structural descriptions. We also developed a codebook after our identification of meaning units and data categories.

Data preparation. First, members of the research team engaged in epoche, which is a process where researchers strive to put away preconceived judgments that may prevent seeing the data as participants present it (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, each research team member described any experiences they had regarding African Americans' attrition from school psychology programs, listed their biases (e.g., the profession has not done enough to recruit and retain minorities), and engaged in a discussion regarding these biases. We then created a document that listed our biases and referenced this document throughout the data analysis process. Next, the specialist-level research team member and the primary researcher transcribed verbatim the audiotaped interviews, leaving space for coding and commentary. The primary researcher checked all transcriptions for accuracy using the audiotaped interviews as comparisons. Each participant also reviewed her or his transcripts for accuracy.

Holistic understanding. During this stage, we carefully and repeatedly read over interview transcriptions to obtain a holistic understanding of each transcription (Creswell, 2007). Research team members used a reflexive journal (Creswell) to

record thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and biases while attempting to achieve a holistic understanding of each transcript. Bi- weekly research team meetings allowed an opportunity for members' biases, related to the emerging data, to be discussed and challenged.

Horizonalizing. Horizonalizing the data involved reviewing each transcribed interview for nonrepetitive, significant statements that were relevant to each research question (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). These nonrepetitive statements were highlighted, while repetitive statements were eliminated (Creswell; Moustakas). Nonrepetitive statements that addressed each research question were then transferred to tables. Table 3 illustrates significant statements that represent experiences participants' described as contributing to their decisions to leave school psychology programs.

Meaning units and theme development. We grouped similar nonrepetitive, significant statements into meaning units that when clustered together represented data categories (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As data were collected new meaning units emerged, requiring the development of new categories. This process continued until all meaning units were represented in appropriate categories. Data saturation, which refers to the point at which no new information emerged from the data (Creswell), occurred at the eighteenth interview which took place with the sixth participant. The point at which data saturation occurred in this study is consistent with Boyd's (2001) finding that two to 10 participants are sufficient for reaching data saturation in phenomenological studies. Finally, we developed themes based on connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 3

Selected Significant Statements

- I kinda felt like the professors weren't really in sinc with us.
- I just really didn't feel connected to the department or to my peers.
- My main decision to leave had to do with finances.
- He (a professor) made me feel like I was not adequately prepared.
- I was isolated on a number of different levels.
- The ground-level reality was it's a test driven practice on the school level.
- I was part of that process (special education), and I was disgusted by it.
- I was disengaged with the material and maybe the people.
- I mean, you're doing the WISC again. It just became monotonous.
- I wanted to get a mentor, and I just didn't feel like I clicked with any of them in that manner.
- Instead of just writing reports saying yes they qualify, no they don't for special education, I wanted to be able to provide more consultation to teachers.

Textural and structural descriptions. Once all participants' face-to-face interviews were completed and analyzed, the primary researcher developed textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) descriptions for each participant. Next, composite textural and structural descriptions were developed. The composite textural description describes what the participants collectively experienced, while the composite structural description describes how they

collectively experienced the phenomenon (See Appendix D) (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The “essence” or universal understanding of participants’ experiences is uncovered through integrating the composite textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, p. 119). Discovering the essence of participants’ experiences is the hallmark of phenomenological research (Creswell; Moustakas,).

Codebook development. Research team members reached consensus on the names and definitions of codes during the stage of data analysis when data categories were identified. The primary researcher then created a first draft codebook. Brief definitions, full definitions, exemplars from the data, and guidelines for use were included for each code. The primary researcher sent this first draft codebook out to the research team for feedback regarding its usability and accuracy based on the consensus of code names and definitions established earlier. Research team members’ feedback was then included in a revised codebook. This revised codebook was used to begin the process of inter coder agreement (ICA), which provides a percentage that represents the level of agreement between researchers on codes and subcodes (Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi, & Borgatti, 1999).

Establishing ICA and applying the coding system. The school psychology doctoral student and the primary researcher separately coded one participant’s three interviews and then discussed coding discrepancies to establish consensus of coding. Next, these same coders independently reviewed and separately coded one of another participant’s interviews, comparing this coded interview, with a goal of 90% ICA (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986). The coders reached 78% ICA on this first interview and continued the ICA process until reaching 90% ICA which occurred on the fifth

interview (*M* = 78%). After each ICA check, the coders discussed code definitions and discrepancies in applying the codes to the data (Schensul et al., 1999). Thus, prior to obtaining 90% ICA the primary researcher revised the codebook four times. All 21 face-to-face interviews were then coded using the codebook established at the 90% ICA level.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which one can have confidence in a qualitative study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We used several techniques to ensure this study's trustworthiness. For example, we addressed researcher bias using epoche, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing, as described earlier in this paper. Member checking, via sharing transcribed interviews, major and minor themes document, and textural and structural descriptions of the data provided an opportunity for participants to comment on the researchers' interpretation of the data and ensure that participants' voices were accurately represented. Multiple analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002) was achieved by including research team members with diverse backgrounds to help analyze the findings. Furthermore, an independent doctoral educator provided an external audit of the data collection and analysis documents (e.g., raw data, data analysis documents, reflexive journals, major and minor themes documents). Finally, the primary researcher used rich, thick descriptions to present the themes of this study, which will help the reader feel as if he or she is hearing participants' authentic voices. Given this description, readers can decide if the findings might be applicable to others in similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

Two major themes of *Professional Misalignment* and *Relatedness* emerged regarding what experiences contributed to participants' decisions to leave school psychology programs. The major theme of *None* reflects the retention strategy most participants report school psychology programs used. *Funding* (major theme) and *Advise* (minor theme) represent retention strategies participants believed might have encouraged their continuation in the programs they left. Major themes reflect four or more participants' experiences, while the minor theme reflects the experience of three participants. Subthemes provide more detail about major themes to facilitate greater understanding of participants' experiences. Themes are presented using descriptions of *what* (texture) participants experienced in the school psychology programs they left and *how* (structure) they experienced the programs and their decisions to leave. Understanding texture and structure is necessary to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Results are shared using pseudonyms to protect participants' anonymity.

Professional Misalignment

Professional misalignment refers to participants' indication that the practices of school psychology (as presented in the programs they left) were not a fit given their specific career aims. Professional misalignment contributed to five participants' decisions to leave school psychology programs. Analysis revealed that four of these five participants discovered professional misalignment in their first year of school psychology graduate education; three of these individuals decided to leave their program at the end of the first year. The remaining two participants (one specialist

and one doctoral pursuing) who experienced misalignment left at the end of year two and three, respectively. All five participants represented in the misalignment theme left school psychology programs and attended graduate programs in another discipline.

Data analysis uncovered both differences and similarities between the study's five participants who experienced professional misalignment and the two who did not. Unlike those who were misaligned, the two participants who did not experience misalignment remained in the discipline (transferring from one school psychology program to another) and are currently practicing school psychologists. These two participants, in contrast to the others, did not have unmet expectations regarding their school psychology graduate education, and they did not express views that school psychologists practice in a limited capacity. What all except one of the study's seven participants shared in common, however, is the stage at which they left school psychology programs. More specifically, six participants represent "early attritors," or those the literature defines as students who leave doctoral programs within the first two years (Di Pierro, 2007).

One useful way to think about students' early attrition from graduate programs is the process of socialization (i.e., when a newcomer is made a member of a community) (Golde, 1998). According to Golde (1998) to successfully transition into a graduate program, students must: (a) believe that they can intellectually master their coursework, (b) want to be graduate students, (c) want to do the work associated with the profession, and (d) be able to integrate themselves into their department or program. Those who are not affirmative regarding any one of the above are likely to

consider early attrition (Golde). Findings from this study indicate that participants did not express difficulty mastering the academic tasks required of them, nor did they desire *not* to be graduate students. Most participants, however, did question whether school psychology was a professional fit for them. The five who experienced professional misalignment concluded they did not want to do the work that they perceived school psychologists do. Each went on to successfully complete degrees in disciplines they viewed as a better fit professionally. Descriptions of *what* these five participants experienced in school psychology programs revealed *Program Failure to Meet Training Expectations* and *Perceived Job Role Constraint* as two subthemes that emerged under *Professional Misalignment*.

Program failure to meet training expectations. Four participants noted that prior to entering school psychology programs, they had expectations regarding what specific skills school psychology training would allow them to develop; however, upon entering their programs did not perceive that training met their expectations. Shonda, for example, explained during her focused life history that she was labeled academically gifted in elementary school and skipped a grade, causing her to be younger than her grade level peers. As a result, she experienced social challenges as a high school student. Based on her own schooling experience, Shonda entered a school psychology doctoral program with the specific goal to acquire skills that would prepare her to work with (e.g., counsel) gifted children around social-emotional concerns. Regarding choosing school psychology, she noted, “So I wanted to see what interesting experiences could come out of interacting and potentially mentoring and helping gifted students that might have been in a similar situation.”

Shonda revealed in her second interview, however, that during the one year she spent in her school psychology program, she did not receive exposure to the gifted school-aged population or courses she believed would help her meet the social-emotional needs of gifted students. Discussing the coursework she did take Shonda, recalled, "I don't remember ever feeling connected to the subject matter…I never felt connected to it at all." At the end of her first year, Shonda transferred to another graduate program within the same department. As she reflected on her decision to leave the school psychology program she said, "I think I didn't really connect with it the way that I thought I would."

Kevin, in his focused life history, described a college experience mentoring a young African American male labeled as emotionally disturbed. Kevin felt the child's label was not justified. Once learning that a school psychologist labeled his mentee, Kevin decided to enter school psychology to help address African Americans' disproportionate representation in special education. The program Kevin selected characterized its training as ecologically oriented. Kevin believed such an orientation would be a good fit for him "philosophically" as well as provide him with a skill set to help address disproportionality. Early in his specialist program, however, Kevin became "frustrated" because he did not believe he was being equipped to address African Americans' disproportionate placement in special education. During his second interview, Kevin described how his professors responded when he raised the topic of disproportionality in special education:

> It was the polite, sort of negotiation away from the subject matter. There would be a lot of head-nodding, you know what I mean. Um, but in terms of how you know in what ways are we being trained to undo this pattern, there wasn't a lot of those kinds of conversations. And I really didn't have a sense

> that I was being equipped with the tools to out and be part of the solution instead of the problem.

Kevin, along with several other participants, described feeling "frustrated" (particularly when engaged in classroom discussions focused on issues related to race and socioeconomic status) during their time in school psychology programs. However, in Kevin's meaning making interview he acknowledged that although school psychology was a "bad fit," his experience as a school psychology graduate student was "extremely salient and remain so to the present." Today, Kevin is a professor (in another discipline) whose work focuses on the African-American school-aged population. Reflecting on his school psychology graduate experience Kevin noted:

> I think I benefitted from the experience because it gave me an opportunity to move in a different direction- in a direction that I think is more appropriate for my interests and my orientation towards scholarship, towards schooling, towards my professional aspirations. Ultimately it pushed me to be more critical about a lot of different things; ideas or experiences that I had, not only those that I had in that program and within school psychology, but it pushed me to be more critical of approaches to schooling and approaches to certain explanations for the achievement gap. And that critical perspective is something I certainly appreciate.

Perceived job role constraint. All five participants who experienced professional misalignment perceived the role of the school psychologist as being constrained by certain tasks. Participants most often noted that they viewed school psychologists' role as constrained by testing and other duties associated with special education placement. Amel, for example, acknowledged that by the middle of her first semester (as a school psychology graduate student) she perceived that school psychologists primarily test. After administering only three tests- assignments for a cognitive assessment course, Amel decided that school psychology was not a

professional fit. She indicated, “I knew by October that it was not for me.” While describing her experience, Amel noted that even before her first semester of training was over she felt “disengaged from the material.” When asked how faculty presented the profession Amel said, “It just sounded like a lot of testing and they were talking about ratios of like school psychologists to students and it was ridiculous and, yeah it just sounded overwhelming actually.” Analysis of participants’ responses to queries regarding *how* they felt about their programs indicated that, similar to Amel, four of the five who experienced professional misalignment described feeling detached from school psychology programs’ curriculum primarily due to the heavy emphasis on testing. For these participants, feelings of detachment emerged early (i.e., first year) in their experience as school psychology graduate students.

Kendall, who is currently a licensed clinical psychologist, also viewed school psychology as predominantly testing focused which, partly due to her interest in neuropsychology, she perceived as a job constraint. After one year, Kendall left her school psychology doctoral program to enter a clinical psychology doctoral program. While discussing her decision to leave the school psychology program, Kendall stated, “When I actually made the decision to leave I was like well I can look for a clinical program where I can do both- school stuff, you know the assessment stuff and neuro…” She further explained, “I was trying to make sure I was going down a path that did not lead me to being pigeon holed as a school psychologist.” Ironically, during her clinical psychology doctoral training Kendall worked on a research project with a school psychology doctoral student who specialized in neuropsychology. During the meaning making interview Kendall contemplated, “If I had finished the

school psychology program I would have been done with school a lot sooner and maybe I still would have been able to do what I wanted to do." However, as Kendall continued discussing how she has made meaning of leaving her school psychology program, she revealed that she believes her previously held view of school psychologists as primarily testers is accurate. As a private practice clinical psychologist, she often attends school-based meetings to advocate for her young clients. She observed:

> I don't see the school psychologists working with the kids who do fall into that social emotional category, you know, a kid with an emotional problem or a behavioral problem…the school psychologist is not working as a psychologist in that situation. The school psychologists here in (City X), the experiences I've had with them seem to be, well that is a social emotional problem, I don't have anything to do with that, I've tested them, they don't have a learning disability, you all figure it out. There are people who go into school psychology to become psychometrists, you know, to test only, um, and for some people that is, that is fulfilling.

In her final reflections Kendall noted, "Leaving was probably the best thing because I have more options open to me so now I am working in a job that I absolutely love and I don't think I would have gotten that as a school psychologist." All five participants who experienced professional misalignment noted that the experience of attending and leaving school psychology programs was corrective since it pushed them to consider other professional options that more closely aligned with their philosophies, beliefs, and professional interests.

Relatedness

This study's participants also experienced difficulty successfully integrating into their school psychology programs. Recall that according to Golde (1998), new graduate students are less likely to consider early attrition if they believe they belong

(i.e., are able to academically and socially integrate with program peers and faculty). The major theme of *Relatedness* illustrates some of the interactions participants experienced with faculty and peers in the school psychology programs they left. *Relatedness* refers to relationships, or lack thereof, between participants and other individuals in their school psychology programs. Subthemes revealed specific references to relationships, or lack thereof, with program faculty and program peers as contributing to participants' decisions to leave. Furthermore, race played a role in most participants' interactions with both faculty and peers, and several participants chose to leave their programs simultaneously with a peer. All seven participants are represented in the *Relatedness* theme -revealing it as a universal experience linking participants' experiences.

Faculty. Six participants described relationships, or lack thereof, with faculty as contributing to their decisions to leave programs. For instance, Michelle, one of the participants who did not experience professional misalignment, shared in her second interview that the primary reason she left her school psychology program was lack of advising. She explained, "…it kinda felt like the professors weren't really in sync with us, with what we were doing, like I really felt like we needed like a person that was an advisor…" Regarding her relationship with her professors at the program she left, she further noted:

> It was just like a student-teacher, there wasn't really any connection that I had with any of the professors, it was just kinda like I'm here to take your course, you're here to grade my stuff and give me a grade for it.

Michelle described feeling so discontent that at the beginning of her second year, she began researching other potential school psychology programs where she could

transfer. When asked if she spoke to any of her professors regarding her desire for advisory relationships she said, “I didn’t because I didn’t really feel like I had a relationship with anybody that I could approach them.” Michelle, who is currently a doctoral-level school psychology practitioner, explained the difference in student-faculty interactions at the program she left versus the one to which she transferred. She stated that in the latter, everyone is assigned an advisor with whom they have “regularly scheduled contact.” Michelle noted that “having somebody who is checking in to see how you are doing” was important for completing her doctoral degree. Yet, she indicated that she would not have transferred from her first program if she had obtained even minimal faculty advisement. She explained:

> I don’t think that the problems would have ever gotten to the level they did because, I mean, it wasn’t like I really needed somebody to, um, provide a serious amount of mentoring. I just wanted, like some basic advising on my classes and, um, like some progress feedback, nothing that was really like great and spectacular, but it was lacking in any way, shape, or form.

Two other participants also expressed that opportunities to establish relationships with their faculty via advisement were not available to them in the programs they left. These participants, like Michelle, indicated that having such relationships might have encouraged their continuation in their programs.

Shonda, the participant who left her school psychology program to attend another program located in the same department, did not recall any relationships with school psychology faculty when the interviewer specifically asked. However, she did discuss several positive relationships she developed with faculty in the program to which she transferred. Shonda explained that she had substantial contact with professors in her new program because “two main professors taught most of the

classes." In fact, it was typical for Shonda to attend two different classes instructed by the same professor in one day. Having "more hands on opportunity with the professors" facilitated Shonda's ability to establish positive relationships with them. Contrastingly, Shonda described her school psychology program as "just a different environment" where she felt "no attachment." When questioned about any attempts she made to interact with the school psychology professors, Shonda said, "I didn't want to socialize with them at all." Referencing the potential ramifications of her behavior she explained, "Some people just play the game better…I just want to do what I am there to do and go home, if I gotta go to happy hour and all that kinda stuff, I'll just take the hit." Regarding her detachment from the school psychology program she said, "it may have been my own lack of ability to assimilate." Reflecting, Shonda contemplated if the cumulative time spent in each program might have factored into her differential experiences. Dismissing time as a factor she noted, "Keep in mind, I was in both programs for about an equal amount of time."

Analysis of participants' responses to a query that asked them to describe the differences between the school psychology programs they left and the graduate programs they subsequently entered provides further insight into experiences with faculty. More specifically, for all seven of this study's participants, the qualitative difference between their relationships with faculty in the school psychology programs they left and the programs they subsequently entered was that the new program faculty members were accessible, approachable, and culturally sensitive faculty. Given such faculty characteristics, all participants reported positive and meaningful

relationships with faculty in the graduate programs in which they subsequently entered and persisted until degree completion.

Race. Further analysis of participants' experiences with faculty revealed that five described instances where race played a role in their interactions. This finding is of particular interest because the interviewer did not introduce or raise race as a topic, instead discussions regarding race emerged "bottom-up" from the data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 16). Furthermore, only participants who attended HBCUs as undergraduate students indicated that race played a role in their relationships (with both faculty and peers). For example, Lisa, who attended a highly selective HBCU located in the Southeastern United States, recalled her first advisory meeting with a professor in the program she left:

> That conversation had started out well until he mentioned that I had graduated from a black school and that their students from HBCUs didn't tend to do well. You know, I'm like where do you get that from? Really? Maybe you just haven't come across the right one. Like, maybe they just don't apply here.

She later described an academic experience she had in one of this same professor's courses:

> My first test that I took in Professor X class, he gave us study guides. So of course I'm thinking oh I'm coming to this rigorous program. This man is telling me I'm not gonna do well in this program because, you know, I'm not gonna do well. So when I see the first test, and I'm like, wow, really the exact wording of each question. And when the test came back, of course I got a hundred on the test, and I'm like how could you not? He spoon-fed you the information. And when I realized that is this all you expect me to do? I can give you this all day long, all day long. So, I was like, this is gonna be pretty easy cause I'm thinking undergrad I wrote a thesis.

Lisa obtained a Masters Degree from this program before transferring to another school psychology program where she completed a specialist degree. Looking back

at her interaction with the professor at her first program she noted, “I guess I’m long over the pissed off part with Professor X. I’m long over that, but it’s just like I can’t believe he actually felt like that was alright to say.” When asked how she makes meaning out of her experience in the program she left, Lisa stated that she left an impression. She added, “The impression may have been that you stopped telling little Black girls and little Black boys who come from HBCUs that they’re not gonna do well in the program. That may have been my purpose.”

Kendall, who also graduated from a HBCU, discussed an assessment course in which she believed she was unfairly graded. During this course, students were required to practice administering tests while the course professor and classmates observed. Kendall noted that the grades she and an Asian student received were much lower than the grades her White peers obtained although she “could not see any difference between what they were doing.” When she went to speak with the professor regarding her perception of this grading discrepancy she recalled the professor saying, “You know you are not the best student we have.” Kendall maintained, “I still think the teacher in that class was racist, I really do.” Although Kendall noted that funding was the *primary* reason she left her program, Kendall described her experience with this professor as playing a supporting role in her decision to attrite.

Nia, also a HBCU graduate, detailed several situations in which race influenced her interactions with faculty. Nia described attending a group that program faculty invited all minority students to participate in to discuss diversity related concerns. The initiation of this group occurred at the same time the faculty

was preparing for an APA accreditation site visit. She recalled what took place during and after the site visit:

> The people for APA accreditation came, and they wanted to talk to all the students. And they asked us, one of the questions they asked us was about diversity. And I mentioned the group that had been started to address diversity. You know, it was a group that I was proud of that started to address some of these issues. And then, don't you know, we never had another group meeting again. After you know all the paperwork was filled in, then it's like oh well, suddenly they didn't feel like they needed this group anymore. And I thought hmm, that's interesting. I felt very used. Like, did they just create that group just specifically for that? And of course being a minority and feeling that there were clearly some issues that needed to be addressed that, you know, like they were just, just totally created this thing just for accreditation. Not because they were really interested in improving the program in terms of diversity.

Nia, who was the only African American in her cohort of 12, also described feeling "annoyed" when race related conversations would come up in her school psychology core classes and school psychology faculty would elicit her input. She explained, "I always knew like, I was going to be asked. And I didn't like that because sometimes I just want to listen. Sometimes I just don't feel like sharing. It's like if I want to share, I'll raise my hand." Nia described a contrasting experience with a professor in a class she took outside of the school psychology program. She recalled, during a class discussion, another graduate student asking her what was her "secret" to making it to graduate school. Nia shared the professor's response and her subsequent feelings:

> And my teacher– I remember thinking at the time – I really liked that she, she immediately responded to that person and said you know that question is really out of line in the sense of what do you mean, what is her secret. Like she has something in her back pocket that she just pulls out. She was like, she did what most people to do to get here. She worked to get into her program like I would assume most people in graduate school did. I was grateful for that because it's like, I felt like a lot of times I was being called out to answer

> stuff. I was the black person in class, and it was nice to have a teacher who actually stepped up and said, you know you don't have to answer that.

Peers. Six participants indicated that relationships, or lack thereof, between themselves and school psychology program peers contributed to their decisions to leave their programs. Subthemes of *race* and *simultaneous decision making* provide for greater understanding of participants' interactions with their peers while in the programs they chose to leave. As noted previously, only participants who attended HBCUs are represented in the *race* subtheme.

Race. Four of the participants (Lisa, Kevin, Nia, and Kendall) who discussed race in regards to their relationships with faculty also described situations in which race played a role in their interactions with program peers. Kevin, the only male in a cohort that included five White women, acknowledged that his entry into school psychology was "political and oppositional." Regarding his classmates, Kevin noted that he was "very vigilant of and sort of weary of them and any indication that they might be racist." When asked if his cohort members invited him to social gatherings he explained:

> To their credit, they did. But I wasn't interested, you know. And one of the students, she called me one day she said Kevin I don't know what's going on with you. Because it got to a point where I was wearing it on my face when I'd show up to class. And she said Kevin I don't know what's going on, but we are not your enemy. And she talked personally. I am not your enemy. And I can see you're going through a lot. But by that time, the first year was almost already over with, and then we were going into our externship. So, that was just one of those life lessons for me. That you shouldn't invest in distance unless there's a certain reason to invest in distance. That was just my own – I had like a whole closet full of Malcolm X t-shirts, you know what I mean. That was just my orientation. Um, and so, I was I think unfortunately too suspicious.

Nia described her cohort members as middle to upper class White women who "seemed like they had never been around non-white, non-middle class people." She vividly remembered one class discussion where a cohort member indicated that she would be uncomfortable going into a minority neighborhood alone to do a home visit. Nia, who during her focused life history discussed growing up in an upper middle class African American community, observed that her classmate did not distinguish between a high crime neighborhood and a minority neighborhood. Nia noted that she did not engage classmates in such conversations because "there's so many and I'd be talking to them all the freaking time." Nia added, "I think part of it for me too was just the whole stereotype thing. I didn't want to be angry black person…"

Two participants (Lisa and Michelle) described close relationships with a White cohort member, while the remaining five participants recalled supportive relationships with African American students in other graduate programs, or more advanced African Americans students in their school psychology programs. While Lisa fondly remembered one of her closest friends as being a White female cohort member, she described feeling disconnected from her other cohort members. Lisa revealed, "I remember being in classes with a bunch of White girls who were all engaged to doctors or dentists. Oh wow, great, I don't relate to you all at all." Lisa attended a few program related outings with her peers. She described her experience at one event, "I remember feeling like I don't wanna be here. And it was one of the White clubs, and there weren't that many Black people. I wasn't comfortable. I wasn't comfortable, you know."

Simultaneous decision making. Even though participants described somewhat strained relationships with their peers, three participants sought peer input when deciding if they should leave their programs. Each of these participants made a decision to leave their program after engaging in conversations with a program peer (who was also considering leaving) related to leaving the program. For instance, Kendall decided to leave her school psychology program at the same time as her roommate, an African American student in the cohort that entered one year before her. Both Kendall and her roommate entered the program with full funding, and both decided to leave when the Dean could not guarantee them full funding for the following academic year. After discussing their dilemma, Kendall and her roommate arranged and together attended meetings with the department chair and Dean to discuss the matter. Kendall explained, "When they said that they were not going to guarantee us our same fellowships, and they couldn't figure out what the level of funding was going to be, we decided not to come back." Kendall subsequently entered a clinical psychology doctoral program where she received full funding up until her paid internship year.

Amel detailed making a decision to leave her program alongside a White cohort member. Amel remembered conversations with this peer when they questioned if they really wanted to remain in the school psychology program. Amel said, "She was leaning towards counseling and I was just leaning away from school psychology and trying to figure out what I was going to do so I talked to her." Similarly, Lisa decided to leave her program together with the White cohort member with whom she developed a close friendship. While describing her relationship with

this peer, she noted, “We always made sure we were signing up for the same classes at the same times. We studied together. We did a lot together. We made our decision to terminate, we did that together.”

In addition to investigating what experiences contributed to African Americans’ decisions to leave programs, this study investigated what strategies, if any, school psychology programs used to retain participants. If programs did use retention strategies, participants’ perceptions’ of the strategies were also of interest. Finally, the study explored retention strategies that participants believed might have encouraged their continuation. Findings related to these specific topics are reported below.

None

Five out of the seven participants reported that programs did not use any retention strategies to try to retain them. Four of these five individuals went to their school psychology program faculty to tell them they were leaving. Nia stated, “Honestly, they didn’t try to keep me at all. It was more like, you know, we just had a conversation where I told them I was leaving, and they were just like, “OK.” Shonda did not believe her program was concerned about retaining African American students. When asked why she felt that way she shared, “because if they were I should have been one to retain just to help the numbers, they didn’t have any to begin with so I don’t know that I can say they were concerned about retention.” Recall that Shonda left her school psychology program to attend another program within the same department. Even given her continued close proximity, Shonda reported that

the school psychology faculty did not inquire about why she left the program. With a slight laugh she said, “there was no send off, no card, no lunch, no nothing.”

Two participants reported that school psychology faculty members were helpful to them once learning of their decisions to leave. For instance, a faculty member wrote a letter of recommendation for Michelle to enter another school psychology program, while a faculty member sat down with Amel to try and help her process her next steps after exiting her school psychology program. Still, the following comment by Michelle characterizes how most participants felt about their departure: “I remember thinking, I wonder if anybody would really notice that I was gone if I hadn’t even told them, I wonder how long it would have took somebody to figure out that I hadn’t signed up for any classes.”

Too late. It is noteworthy that two participants did report that their programs used retention strategies. Both Kendall and Kevin described the use of a sole faculty advocate, one school psychology faculty member who acted as an advocate on behalf of the participant, as a retention strategy. These participants reported positive feelings towards these faculty members. For instance, referring to his faculty advocate Kevin said, “I would not have earned my Masters without her influence and involvement in my program.” This participant’s faculty advocate, who was an African American female, tried to encourage his continuation in the program, but it was too late in his decision making process. He recalled meeting with his advisor to inform her of his decision, “It wasn’t a discussion. I was leaving.” Kendall described how her faculty advocate, who was a Jewish male, tried to help her retain her funding, “I did talk to him about funding…he was actually writing letters and calling and

trying to talk to the Dean." Kendall also indicated that by the time her program offered her partial funding, it was too late to apply for other fellowship opportunities that would help her finance the remaining half of her education. After leaving her program, she wrote the faculty a letter with suggestions for how they could have handled her situation better. She did not receive a reply. She noted, "I wasn't expecting a response."

Funding

When asked what retention strategies might have encouraged their continuation in the programs they left, funding emerged as a major theme. Funding refers to participants' statements that offers of funding, exclusive of student loans, might have encouraged their continuation in their programs. Analysis revealed that only one participant, Michelle, indicated taking out loans to finance her education in the school psychology program she left. Kendall, the participant who left her school psychology program due to funding not being renewed, was unwilling to take out student loans to persist for a second year. All others described having assistantships or campus related positions that provided financial support. Even though only two participants noted that lack of funding contributed to their decisions to leave school psychology programs, four indicated that funding would have encouraged their continuation. For example Michelle stated, "if there had been some other funding opportunities available, then that would have helped," while Lisa noted, "maybe saying, hey the rest of your time here we will pay for."

Advise

Finally, three participants also indicated that having career guidance and/or program advisement might have encouraged their continuation in their program. Nia explained, “steering me in terms of where people are doing more consultation in school psychology. I just didn’t feel like I was being guided. If I had more guidance and somebody could show me how I would’ve gone to that area more.” Shonda offered that program faculty could have taken “more of a personalized interest, you know, in terms of helping me formulate and shape my career path.” Michelle suggested:

> At the basic level, just tracking people and even if it only, like, a 15 minute conference to see how you are doing, to see how many courses you have, I mean if it not gonna go beyond taking a look at your courses, at least to do that because I felt like nobody really tracked my stuff, but me.

The Essence of Leaving

The process that led to participants’ decisions to leave school psychology graduate education began when they first entered school psychology programs through their experiences with programs’ training foci, their formative views of the actual role school psychologists play in schools, and their difficulties with establishing meaningful relationships with their faculty and/ or peers. Unmet training expectations and perceptions of school psychologists as solely “testers” served to facilitate most participants’ initial disconnect with programs and the profession. This disconnect was further compounded by strained or non-existent relationships with program peers and or/ faculty. Each participant’s narrative illustrated this universal experience of having difficulty establishing positive, strong relationships with either program faculty or peers. While in programs, participants expressed initial feelings

of “frustration,” “annoyance,” and being “uncomfortable.” Such feelings facilitated participants’ further detachment (physical and emotional) from their programs. This detachment resulted in lack of academic and social integration. Most left their programs void of attachment to their faculty and/ or peers, and believing that few would even be aware of their absence.

Discussion

The study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it is one of the only studies to explore attrition in school psychology graduate education. Second, it extends the broader graduate school attrition research by using qualitative methodology to provide rich, thick descriptions of African American leavers’ graduate school experiences. Third, findings suggest that potential differences may exist between African Americans based on the type of undergraduate institutions they attend (i.e., HBCUs versus PWIs). This finding has not been discussed in prior research related to African Americans’ graduate school experiences and may hold implications for future investigations focused on the recruitment and retention of African Americans in school psychology programs.

Participants noted professional misalignment, defined as their indication that school psychology was not a fit given their specific career aims, as one factor that contributed to their departure from school psychology programs. Differences existed between the two participants who left one school psychology program to attend another and the five who exited the discipline completely; the former did not experience misalignment while the latter did. Like individuals who departed counselor education programs (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005), five participants in this

study noted misalignment between their career aims and programs' training focus. Unlike those in Hoskins and Goldberg (2005), these five participants also perceived misalignment between their specific career aims and the profession as a whole. This study extends the literature by identifying the specific reasons that misalignment occurred for the African Americans sampled (i.e., programs' failure to meet participants' expectations regarding the specific professional skills they hoped to develop and participants' perceptions of the school psychologist job role as constrained). Participants, for instance, expected to learn how to "help" children via consultation and counseling, but noted that their programs emphasized cognitive assessment. This was particularly problematic for several participants who, unsettled by African American students' disproportionate placement in special education (Sullivan, A'Vant, Baker, Chandler, Graves, McKinney, & Sayles, 2009), entered school psychology programs expecting that they would gain skills (e.g., consultation and intervention) to help address disproportionality. Instead, while in school psychology programs these participants began to view school psychologists as "gatekeepers" to special education whose professional practice was constrained by testing and placing children in special education. Participants' specific perceptions of school psychologists' job role as constrained by testing extended their misalignment beyond the program level to the profession as a whole.

Research (e.g., Fagan, 2002; Tarquin & Truscott, 2006) suggests that participants' perceptions that the school psychologist role is constrained by activities associated with testing and placing students in special education were accurate. In fact, national demographic studies (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999; Curtis,

Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002; Curtis, Lopez, Batsche, & Smith, 2006) consistently indicate that school psychologist spend the majority of their time in activities related to assessment for special education placement purposes. This trend seems to filter down to school psychologists in training. For instance, Tarquin and Truscott (2006) reported that, despite NASP-approved programs' efforts to train students in professional functions away from the traditional model of assessment for special education, practicum students spend most of their time in assessment activities, and little time in consultation or counseling. While five of this study's seven participants did attend NASP-approved programs, it is important to note that, at the time of this study, an average of 10.7 years had passed since participants attended school psychology programs. Four participants attended the programs they left prior to the implementation of NASP's most recent training standards that require school psychology students to demonstrate a variety of competencies including consultation, problem-solving, and intervention (NASP, 2002). This may have substantially influenced the type of training participants received and subsequently their perceptions of the practice of school psychology. Still, Tarquin and Truscott noted that the new roles and practices (e.g., consultation and intervention) school psychology students are currently learning in NASP-approved programs are not transferring to their field-based practicum experiences. Given the finding that participants perceived school psychologist's job role as constrained by testing and special education related activities, it may prove prudent for programs to provide African American students with early (i.e., first year) practicum experiences whereby they are paired with supervisors who engage in a variety of activities including,

intervention, consultation, and counseling. Courses and field-based experiences (incorporated into the first year experience) that reflect new roles and practices for school psychologists (Collins & Proctor, 2009) may help decrease the likelihood that African Americans would become early attritors due to perceptions of job role constraint, while simultaneously providing skills development that is more consistent with their expectations.

Results also found that participants' poor relationships with faculty contributed to decisions to leave school psychology programs. This finding is consistent with the graduate student attrition literature (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Golde, 1994; Lovitts, 2001), as well as research that suggests African Americans experience difficulty establishing positive relationships with faculty, particularly White faculty (e.g., Ellis, 2001; Gasman et al., 2008). Participants in this study described poor relationships with faculty specifically in relation to advisement. According to the graduate attrition literature (e.g., Bair & Haworth, 1999; Lovitts), having a positive relationship with a faculty advisor is the most important factor in persistence or non-persistence towards doctoral degree completion. Three of this study's participants (one specialist and two doctoral seeking) noted a complete absence of faculty advisement. Another participant described an advisory relationship whereby the faculty advisor expressed low academic expectations due to her prior attendance at a HBCU. African American graduate students in other studies (e.g., Hunn, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Ellis) have reported strained relationships with White faculty due to their perceptions that White faculty do not value the contributions they bring to the academic setting. Yet, reports of positive relationships

between African American graduate students and culturally sensitive White faculty are also present in the literature, often in the same studies that acknowledge strained relationships between White faculty and African American graduate students (e.g., Gasman et al; Hunn). In fact, participants in this current study also experienced both positive and strained relationships with White faculty. This duality in the literature underscores that variations exist within groups, and reminds us to avoid race- based generalizations about any one group of people. However, the literature is clear that the presence of supportive Black faculty represents a vital factor in African American graduate students' persistence towards degree completion (Hunn; Johnson-Bailey). This suggests a need for school psychology, wherein African Americans represent only 0.96% of faculty (Graves & Wright, 2009), to initiate efforts to recruit and retain faculty of color. Others (e.g., Graves & Wright; McIntosh, 2004; Zhou et al., 2004) have also called for increased faculty diversity in school psychology.

An interesting finding emerged related to participants' relationships with faculty and their peers. Specifically, all five of the participants who indicated that race played a role in their relationships attended HBCU's (see Graves & Wright, 2009 for discussion of HBCUs), while the two participants who attended PWIs did not mention race at all when discussing their relationships. This is noteworthy because the interviewer did not raise the topic of race, but participants who attended HBCUs consistently introduced the topic. One possible explanation for this finding is that African Americans' experiences at HBCUs acculturate them to be more aware of racial and social injustices (Williams et al., 2005) and as a result, may be more likely than their peers who attended PWIs for undergraduate to perceive (and critique) race

based social injustices. An alternative hypothesis could be that participants in this & study who attended HBCUs (where the establishment of positive student-teacher relationships is often a trademark of the experience) had difficulty adjusting to the culture of large, White research universities where such student-teacher relationships might not be as prevalent. While this study's sample size limits broad interpretation of this finding, it is an area worthy of further investigation since studies looking at graduate attrition have not explored differences between graduate students' experiences based on their undergraduate attendance at a HBCUs versus PWIs. This type of research might be particularly relevant to school psychology since scholars (e.g., Chandler, 2007; Graves & Wright; Proctor et al., under review) have recently recommended that school psychology programs direct recruitment efforts towards HBCUs.

Social integration, in particular, is important because the literature indicates that students who do not integrate socially into their graduate programs are more likely to leave compared to those who integrate successfully (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Lovitts, 2001). Most participants in this study reported difficulty integrating socially with White peers. Interestingly, unlike African American participants in other studies (e.g., Ellis, 2001; Johnson-Bailey, 2004), participants in this study reported that their White peers often extended invitations to social outings, but many chose intentionally not to accept these offers. This may be due to the "cultural mismatch" participants described between activities that were desirable by their White peers and faculty and themselves. For instance, several participants discussed feeling uncomfortable during attendance at program socials held at predominantly White bars where few people of

color frequented. Consequently, similar to African American students in other studies (e.g., Ellis; Johnson-Bailey; Williams et al., 2005), participants in this study, who typically were the only African Americans in their cohort, deliberately sought out other African American students in other programs and/or cohorts for social support. While similar race peer support is reported as important to African Americans' retention in graduate programs (Gasman et al., 2008; Johnson-Bailey), the fact that this study's participants often sought similar race peer support from individuals *outside* of their programs may have intensified their lack of social integration within their programs. These findings suggest that for African Americans to become socially integrated into school psychology programs, programs must become more culturally sensitive when planning program related social activities, while African American students must be open to attending program events and willing to "play the academic game" as described by a participant in Johnson-Bailey (2004). An additional implication is that programs should make concerted efforts to recruit and retain a critical mass of African American students (Rogers & Molina, 2006) so that these students become less likely to seek social support outside of the program, and are more likely to feel that there are others within their programs who share similar cultural perspectives.

Finally, while most participants noted that programs did not use any retention strategies, they indicated that funding and advisement might have encouraged their continuation in programs. Participants' view that receiving advisement may have been a useful retention strategy is not surprising given that several pinpointed lack of advising as contributing to their decisions to leave programs. However, the

emergence of funding as a potentially useful retention strategy was surprising since only two participants indicated that funding influenced their decisions to leave school psychology programs. This may be because five of the seven participants received fellowships or assistantships. Gasman et al. (2008) indicated that funding does not emerge in the literature as a major theme related to African Americans' experiences in graduate school, although participants in their study demonstrated a significant need for funding. This study's contradictory findings related to funding are similar to those of Proctor et al. (under review). Specifically, Proctor et al. found that few African American school psychologists cited funding as the most important factor in their selection of and retention in school psychology graduate programs, but most recommended funding as an important recruitment and retention strategy for African American students. Both studies' findings suggest a need for further exploration regarding the role funding plays in African Americans' selection, matriculation, and persistence in school psychology programs.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the network sampling technique used may have limited the individuals who could potentially participate since initial recruitment emails were only sent to the primary researcher's professional contacts. Attempts to minimize this limitation were made by asking initial contacts to forward the recruitment widely to professional list serves and other individuals who might meet the study's criteria. Furthermore, sample bias may be present given that those who chose to participate may have had overly negative experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave their programs. Additionally, only seven African

Americans participated in this study, and their experiences are in no way representative of all African American school psychology graduate students. Given that the average time since participants attended the programs they left was 10.7 years, participants had to rely on their memories to respond to interview questions. It is possible that memory deficits or reconstructions could negatively influence the findings. Finally, most participants attended school psychology programs prior NASP's training standards that require school psychology students to demonstrate a variety of professional competencies (e.g., consultation and intervention). Thus, exposure to training models that were not preparing students for comprehensive service delivery models may have influenced participants' experiences and perceptions.

Future Research Directions

Several possibilities for future research exist. This study only focused on the experiences of African Americans who left school psychology programs. Future studies should investigate factors school psychology faculty members view as contributing to African American graduate students' attrition. Participants in this study reported poor relationships with faculty and peers. Studies that investigate African Americans who complete school psychology programs will help determine if challenges with establishing peer and faculty connections is unique to leavers or a general challenge for African American school psychology graduate students. Additionally, all participants who attended HBCUs noted unique challenges establishing relationships with faculty. Future studies should investigate if there are indeed differences in academic and social integration in school psychology programs

based on if students attended HBCUs versus PWIs. A similar study using White school psychology program leavers would contribute to the literature since several participants in this study made decisions to leave programs simultaneously with a White peer. Finally, all participants in this study went on to obtain graduate degrees at programs once leaving their school psychology programs. A significant contribution to the literature would contrast African Americans' experiences in programs they chose to leave versus those in which they persist to degree completion.

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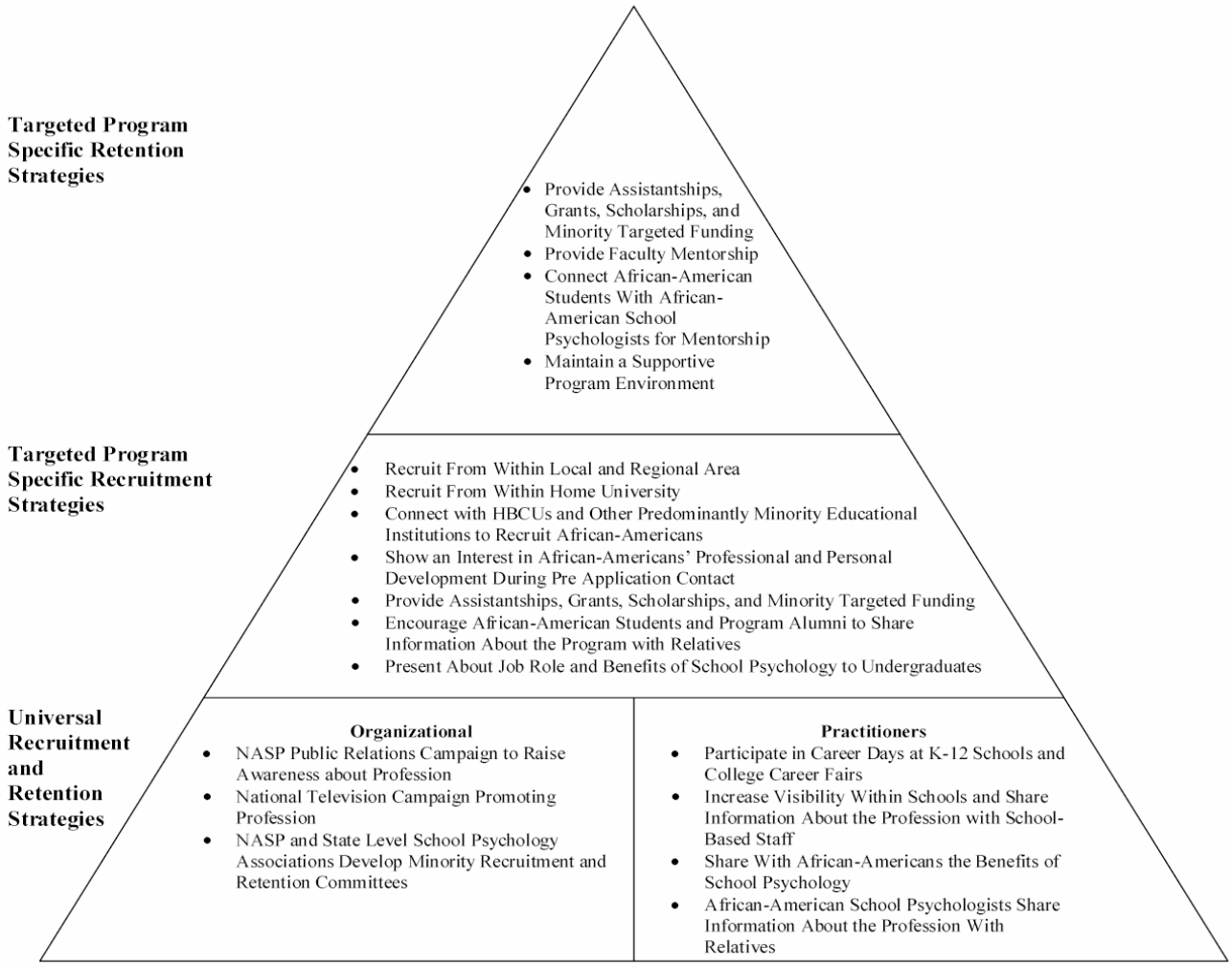
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Three-Tiered Model for African American Student Recruitment and Retention in School Psychology Programs

(Proctor et al., 2008)



APPENDIX B

African American School Psychology Program Leavers
Potential Participants Demographic Inquiry Form

What race/ethnicity are you?
(Let potential participant self-identify)

Gender: F M Age: _____

Current State of Residence:

Which School Psychology Program did you attend?

Under what degree program did you enter the School Psychology Program?
(e.g., Masters, Masters +60, Specialist, Doctorate)

For how long did you attend the program and what were the year(s) of attendance?

If you obtained a degree from the Program, what degree did you obtain?

In what city and state was the School Psychology Program located?

What was your reason for leaving the School Psychology Program?
(Brief answer)

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

**Explain research process and interviews - DO NOT TAPE:*

"My research team and I are studying African Americans who left school psychology programs. We hope that studying the experiences and perceptions of such African Americans will help us better understand the experiences that both facilitate and impede African Americans' matriculation through these programs. For this research we are conducting interviews. We are interested in interviewing you because you are an African American who left a school psychology program.

The interviews will be conducted over three consecutive weeks, with one session taking place per week. Each session will last about 90 minutes to two hours. During the interviewing, I will ask questions about your life prior to entering the school psychology program you left, your experiences while in that program, and how you have made meaning of those experiences since leaving the school psychology program. The interviews will take place at an agreed upon location that is convenient for both of us. Additionally, a fourth and final interview will take place via telephone to validate the information you provided during the three face-to-face interviews. This final interview should take approximately 30 minutes.

If you think you might be interested in participating, I would like to go over the Informed Consent Form with you now. Is that O.K.? *(If yes, proceed; if no, determine if individual is not interested in participating and thank him/her for consideration and end at this point.)*

If participant signs Informed Consent Form then proceed with interview. If not, thank them for their consideration and end at this point.

Do you have any questions about the interview or the research?" *(Answer any questions individual may have regarding the interview or research.)*

I am now going to begin recording the interview. I will turn the tape recorder off any time you ask me to.

BEGIN TAPING.

Demographic Information

1. What is your name?

2. How do you identify racially/ethnically?

3. What is your gender?

4. How old are you?

5. What is your current city and state of residence?

6. In which city and state did you graduate from high school?

7. Which college/university did you attend for undergraduate education?

8. In what city and state was your undergraduate institution located?

9. What was your major/minor in college?

10. Which school psychology program did you attend and leave?

11. What year(s) did you attend that program?

12. In what city and state was that School Psychology Program located?

13. Under what degree program did you enter the School Psychology Program you left?

14. For how long did you attend the program and what were the year(s) of attendance?

15. What degree, if any, did you obtain from the School Psychology Program you left?

16. What was the theoretical orientation of that School Psychology Program?

17. After leaving that School Psychology Program, did you attend any other School Psychology Program? If yes, what was the name of the program and where was it located?

18. In what discipline/area is your most recent (terminal) degree?

19. What is your current occupation?

Interview 1: Focused Life History

Main Exploration: Tell me about your life up until entering the school psychology program you left.

Sub Exploration 1: Tell me about your K-12 and undergraduate educational experiences.
Query 1: *Were there any educational experiences that influenced your decision to pursue school psychology?*
Query 2: Reconstruct any significant experiences that influenced your decision to enter school psychology.

Sub Exploration 2: Tell me about significant people in your life during your childhood and prior to entering the school psychology program you left.
Query: Is there any individual (s) who served as a mentor to you during K-12, college, or graduate school? If so, please discuss.
Query: Describe a significant person or persons, if any, who influenced your decision to enter school psychology.

Sub Exploration 3: Tell me about your decision to enter the school psychology program you left.
Query1: What things were important in your consideration to enter the program?
Query 2: What was the most important factor in your decision to enter the program?

Interview 2: Experiences in School Psychology Programs Participants Left

Introduction: During the last interview we spoke about your life up prior to entering the school psychology program you left. After reflecting on that interview and the questions I asked, as well as your responses, do you have anything else that you might want to share before we begin Interview 2 which is about your experiences in the school psychology program you left?

Main Exploration: Tell me about your experience in the school psychology program you left.

Sub Exploration 1: Tell me about your relationships during your time in that school psychology program.
(Explore can include participants' relationships with those in their personal lives, faculty, program students, individuals within the university, or those within the surrounding community)

Sub Exploration2: Tell me about your academic experience in the school psychology program you left.
(Explore can include both classroom and field-based experiences)
Query 1: What are your perceptions of the academic (classroom and field-based) experiences you had at the school psychology program?

Sub Exploration 3: Tell me about your decision to leave that school psychology program and any experiences that encouraged your decision to leave.

Sub Exploration 4: Tell me about retention strategies, if any, that the school psychology program you left used.
Query 1: Describe any general retention strategies, if any, the program used to retain students.
Query 2: Describe any minority specific focused retention strategies, if any, the program used to retain students.
Query 3: Describe any retention strategies, if any, the program used to try and retain you personally.
Query 4: What do you think of the retention strategies, if attempted, that the school psychology program you left employed?
Query 5: What retention strategies, if any, could the school psychology program you left have used to encourage your continuation in the program?

(Ask the following Sub Exploration if participant left one program and entered another graduate program, even if the graduate program was not a school psychology program)

Sub Exploration 5: Now that we have talked about your experiences in the program you left, and your reasons for leaving that program, I would like for you to talk to me about the graduate program you subsequently entered.
Query 1: Describe any relationships you developed while in that program.
Query 2: Describe recruitment strategies, if any, the program used.
Query 3: If recruitment strategies were used, which ones were most effective for recruiting you?
Query 4: Describe retention strategies, if any, the program used.
Query 5: If retention strategies were used, which ones were most effective for retaining you?
Query 6: Discuss any differences between the program you left and the program you subsequently entered related to recruitment and/or retention practices employed.
Query 7: What do you view as the main reason you remained in this program?

Interview 3 Preparation: We have completed this interview. When we meet again, I will be asking you questions about how you have made meaning out of the experiences and relationships you had while enrolled in the school psychology program you left. Reflecting on our interview today and your experience at the school psychology program you left will help prepare you for our third in person interview.

Interview 3: Meaning Making Out of Experiences in School Psychology Programs Participants Left

Introduction: During the last interview, you shared all about your experiences in the school psychology program you left (as well as your experiences in the graduate program you subsequently attended). We discussed your relationships, academic experiences, and any recruitment/retention strategies the programs used. After reflecting on the questions I posed, your answers, and the overall interview, do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share before we begin Interview 3 which focuses on how you have made meaning out of your experiences in the school psychology program you left?

Main Exploration: Now that you have talked with me about being a school psychology graduate student in the program that you left, what does that mean to you? (Be sure to set this question up in the proper context so participant understands)

Sub Exploration 1: What meaning do you give to the relationships you experienced during your time at the school psychology program?

Sub Exploration 2: What meaning do you make out of your decision to leave the school psychology program?

Sub Exploration 3: How do you currently view the profession of school psychology?

Sub Exploration 4: What are your thoughts about your status as a person of color in the profession of school psychology?

APPENDIX D

Textural Description

When participants talked about experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave school psychology programs, five described programs' failure to meet their expectations for specific skills development and perceptions that school psychologists' job role is constrained by testing. The mismatch between (a) participants' training expectations and the training they received and (b) their specific goals for professional practice and their perceptions of the role of school psychologists contributed to participants' professional misalignment with school psychology. Two other participants did not describe professional misalignment, but like all of those who were professionally misaligned, experienced poor relationships with their program faculty and/ or peers. These poor relationships served as a factor in all participants' decisions to leave their programs. Two participants did describe having one faculty member who acted as an advocate on his/her behalf. These faculty advocates were the only ones these participants informed of their decision to leave their program. When other participants shared with faculty their decisions to leave, they were not discouraged. Outside of these faculty advocates and an offer of funding in one instance, participants did not experience retention strategies.

Structural Description

Participants described a range of feelings during their time in the school psychology programs they left. Labeling of feelings most often occurred when participants discussed classroom or social interactions with White peers and faculty. "Frustrated," "uncomfortable," "annoyed," "disbelief," and "overly suspicious" are

all feelings that participants experienced while in their school psychology programs. Yet, the universal feeling across all seven participants was a feeling of “detachment” from their program faculty and/ or peers. Strained or non-existent relationships with their faculty and peers led to participants leaving of programs void of attachments, and believing that few would notice their absence.