Black Graduate Students’ Experiences of Stress and Coping

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BLACK GRADUATE STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF STRESS AND COPING

by

Shealyn J. Blanchard

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctoral Committee:

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The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Black graduate students related to stress and coping. Specifically, this study seeks to further examine the concept of cognitive appraisal and help-seeking intentions among Black graduate students. Research has indicated that Black graduate students face unique stressors related to race, in addition to general stress demands that can be experienced in graduate education programs. Regarding help-seeking, the literature has tended to focus on psychological help-seeking attitudes with African American populations and undergraduate students. This present study utilizes theories from stress and coping, as well as help-seeking and planned behavior, to explore how Black graduate experience stress and coping. The sample included 169 Black graduate students (master’s and doctoral) that were recruited from two research universities in the Midwest region of the United States using an online survey. The nature of the study was exploratory and descriptive in nature. Thus, qualitative (e.g., thematic analysis) and quantitative (e.g., MANOVA, Multiple Regression, Canonical Correlations) analyses were used. The results indicate that Black graduate students perceive graduate school as moderately stressful. Several themes emerged regarding participants’ appraisal of stressful situations and considerations of consequences for seeking help. Further, the results show that participants are more likely to seek help from parents, friends, partners/spouses,
and professors, compared to other help sources. Results also reveal a moderate positive correlation between stress and coping. Finally, the results do not support the expectation that stress and cognitive appraisal would predict help-seeking intentions.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ xi

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................1

Graduate Education in the United States ..............................................................2

Master’s Education ............................................................................................3

Doctoral Education ...........................................................................................4

Graduate Student Trends in the United States ..................................................4

Graduate Student Experiences ...........................................................................7

Black Graduate Students’ Experiences .............................................................9

Race-Related Experiences of Graduate Students ............................................10

Summary .............................................................................................................15

Statement of the Problem ....................................................................................16

II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....................................................................................19

Theoretical Framework .......................................................................................19

Integrative Model of Stress and Coping ............................................................20

The Influence of Culture .....................................................................................20

Moos’ Integrative Model of Stress and Coping ................................................22

Environmental System (Panel I) ......................................................................22

The Personal System (Panel II) ........................................................................23

The Transitory System (Panel II) ......................................................................26

Cognitive Appraisal and Coping (Panel IV) .......................................................27
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

Cognitive Appraisal ................................................................. 27
Coping ......................................................................................... 28
Health and Well-being (Panel V) .................................................. 29
Summary ..................................................................................... 30
Africentric Psychological Theory .................................................. 31
Africultural Coping ........................................................................ 33
The Theory of Planned Behavior .................................................... 35
Summary ..................................................................................... 38
Summary of Theoretical Framework .............................................. 39
African American Coping Styles .................................................... 40
Summary ..................................................................................... 43
The Strong Black Woman ............................................................. 43
Summary ..................................................................................... 47
The Cool Pose .............................................................................. 47
The Help-Seeking Process ............................................................. 49
Health Help-Seeking .................................................................... 52
Academic Help-Seeking ................................................................. 55
Psychological Help-Seeking ........................................................... 57
Black College Students and Help-Seeking Attitudes ....................... 58
Summary of Help-Seeking Sources ............................................... 61
Barriers to Seeking Help for African Americans ............................. 62
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

Self-concealment and Self-disclosure .....................................................63
Stigma .....................................................................................................64
Cultural Mistrust .....................................................................................66
Factors in Service Use............................................................................67
The Current Study........................................................................................68
Research Questions .................................................................................69

III. METHOD............................................................................................................70

Participants.......................................................................................................70
Measures ..........................................................................................................72

The Background Sheet ...............................................................................72
Graduate Stress Inventory-Revised (GSI-R; Rocha-Singh, 1994)..............73
Summary .................................................................................................79

General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson et al., 2005)......80
Summary .................................................................................................81

Supplemental Help-Seeking Items ............................................................82
Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI; Utsey et al., 2000)......83
Summary .................................................................................................88

Cognitive Appraisal Items ......................................................................88
Data Collection Procedures........................................................................91
Participant Recruitment...........................................................................91
Data Collection Method...........................................................................93
Table of Contents - Continued

CHAPTER

On-line Survey Method ................................................................. 93
Compensation for Participants ..................................................... 94
Data Management ........................................................................ 94
Design of the Study ...................................................................... 95

IV. RESULTS ..................................................................................... 96
Preliminary Analyses .................................................................... 96
Descriptive Analyses .................................................................. 97
Areas of Stress for Black Graduate Students .............................. 97
Types of Help-Seeking Sources for Black Graduate Students .... 100
Coping Strategies Used by Black Graduate Students .................. 102
Appraisal of Stress and the Decision to Seek Help ...................... 103

Inferential Analyses ..................................................................... 109
The Relationship Between Stress and Coping ......................... 109
Stress, Cognitive Appraisal, and Help-Seeking Intentions .......... 112
The Relationship Between Stress and Help-Seeking .................. 114

V. DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 115
Black Graduate Students and Perceived Stress ....................... 115
Black Graduate Students and Help-Seeking Intentions ............. 117
Black Graduate Students and Africultural Coping ................. 118
Black Graduate Students’ Appraisal of Stress and Decision to Seek Help ... 119
Relationship Between Stress and Coping ................................. 122
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

Stress and Cognitive Appraisal Predicting Help-Seeking ...........................................124
Implications for Future Education Practice ...............................................................126
Limitations .............................................................................................................130
Directions for Future Studies ..................................................................................132

REFERENCES .........................................................................................................134

APPENDICES .........................................................................................................156

- A. HSIRB Approval Letter ......................................................................................156
- B. Initial E-Mail Contact to Prospective Research Sites .......................................158
- C. Initial Participant Recruitment Email Script ..................................................160
- D. Follow-Up Participants Recruitment Email Scripts ........................................162
- E. Recruitment Flyer and Social Media Posting ..................................................165
- F. Informed Consent ..............................................................................................167
- G. Background Sheet ............................................................................................171
- H. The GSI-R (Rocha-Singh, 1994) .................................................................176
- I. The GHSQ (Wilson et al., 2005) ..................................................................179
- J. Supplemental Help-Seeking Questions ............................................................181
- K. The ACSI (Utsey et al., 2000) ......................................................................183
- L. Cognitive Appraisal Items ..............................................................................187
- M. Debriefing Page ..............................................................................................189
LIST OF TABLES

1. Summary of Cross Comparison of Theories ........................................................... 40


3. Canonical Correlations Analyses on the GSI-R Subscales and the ACSI Subscales .. 112
INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States has a storied and awful history regarding Black students. The foundation of education has been built primarily on systematic racism and oppression, with academic institutions and curriculum being formed from a Eurocentric frame and funded by slavery (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). From the time of slavery in the United States to the mid-20th century, numerous socio-political and educational policies were put in place that disenfranchised Black students from obtaining quality and equitable education (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). After the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education and responses to the Civil Rights Act, the 1960's was a period of tremendous growth of enrollment for Black students in higher education (Allen, 1988). During this new wave of educational enrollment, many African Americans became the first in their families to pursue higher education (Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996). Access to higher education continues to improve for Black students; however, there are still many issues regarding education that can be burdensome and harmful to this particular group of students. As the political, social, and economic structure of the United States changes, the importance and benefits of obtaining an education are also shifting.

In the United States, education is the vehicle for upward mobility, social status, and economic success (Clewell & Anderson, 1995). The devaluation of the bachelor's degree and the limited representation of African Americans in many sectors of employment kindle a social and cultural responsibility for African Americans to pursue and earn advanced degrees beyond the bachelor's degree (Isaac, 1998). Obtaining a graduate degree has the potential to provide more benefits, such as better employment opportunities, financial gains, and personal and intellectual
edification (Neville & Chen, 2007). Understanding how Black graduate students navigate through graduate school can provide information to create programming geared to successful engagement and completion of degrees. As a result, many graduate school programs have worked to implement a more diverse, supportive, and democratic environment for Black graduate students, leading to an increase in Black students’ attendance (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

There continues to be growing body of research (e.g., Blackmon & Thomas, 2014; Coleman, Chapman, & Wang, 2012; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; McClain, 2014) on the experiences of Black undergraduate students. However, there is limited research concerning Black graduate students’ experiences. The sections that follow highlight current understanding about various aspects of graduate education. First, an introduction into the graduate education landscape points out trends and requirements of graduate degrees. Second, general graduate students' experiences are examined. Third, research specific to the experiences of Black graduate students is reviewed. The chapter concludes with a statement of the problem.

**Graduate Education in the United States**

Graduate school is defined as an educational endeavor, beyond the bachelor’s degree, through which a person receives an advanced degree or credential (Isaac, 1998). Graduate education is considered to be the stage where emerging professionals undergo their most intense socialization and training process towards their specific profession (Hall & Allen, 1982). There are two distinct levels of graduate education: master’s and doctoral degrees. The master's degree is earned after a bachelor's degree and is often terminal (Isaac, 1998). Master's degree can be obtained in a variety of academic disciplines, such as Art, Teaching, Math, History, Psychology, Chemistry, and Religion. The doctoral degree is the highest and most prized educational level one can achieve (Isaac, 1998). Doctoral degrees include the doctor of philosophy, the
professional doctorate in psychology, as well as professional degrees such as medicine, law, dentistry, and optometry. According to a 10-year longitudinal study of individuals pursuing a graduate degree, the average time to complete a degree was three years for master's degree, four years a professional degree, and six years for a doctoral degree (Neville & Chen, 2007).

Master’s Education

There is a small amount of, and somewhat dated, literature that has examined the master's degree education process (e.g., Bonifazi, Crespy, & Reiker, 1997; Cassanova, Johnson, Vidoli, & Wangberg, 1992; Demb & Funk, 1999). Graduate education in the United States is primarily comprised of master's degrees (Cassanova et al., 1992). A master's degree can often be viewed as a gateway to pursuing doctoral and professional degrees (Cassanova et al., 1992; Bonifazi et al., 1992). To this end, many master's degree programs offer graduate students the option of engaging in one of two tracks: a general examination or a research thesis track (Demb & Funk, 1999). The master’s thesis allows students to be engaged in research and learn skills that may serve as a track toward pursuing doctoral degrees (Demb & Funk, 1999). The nation has been dependent on master’s degree recipients to produce faculty members at community colleges, maintain a competitive economy through employment innovations, and pursue doctoral degrees (Cassanova et al., 1992).

Since it is viewed that obtaining a master's degree can serve as a proxy for continuing graduate education into doctoral programs, more understanding concerning the experiences of master’s-level students is essential. Some master’s degree programs are similar to doctoral degree programs, in that students are required to complete an internship, conduct a thesis, and be engaged in clinical rotations. Thus, how graduate students navigate through, and complete master’s-level programs and the implication of doctoral studies are fundamental to understand.
Doctoral Education

There is a small collection of work (e.g., Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Di Pierro, 2007; Hadjioannou, Shelton, Fu, & Dhanarattigannon, 2007; Pifer & Baker, 2014) that explores the graduate education process of doctoral students. Doctoral students can be viewed as having to go through a series of stages as they move through their program. Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) identified three stages in which the matriculation of a doctoral student entails. The transition stage is the stage in which doctoral students get acclimated to their graduate programs and institutions (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). The development stage is considered to be the time where students are completing required courses and acquiring skills specific to conducting research and to their professions (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Finally, the research stage is seen as the capstone of the degree program where students use all the knowledge and skills from the development stage to complete the dissertation (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). With the tasks that doctoral students must do, Black (2012) asserts that pursuing a doctoral degree is similar to the training efforts of preparing to run a marathon, in that it takes immense dedication, persistence, skill, and preparation to complete.

Graduate Education Trends in the United States

Enrollment into graduate education between fall 2015 and fall 2016 has increased by a total of 0.9%; however, first-time graduate enrollment only increased by 1.9% (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). According to a joint-survey of 625 institutions in the United States, conducted by the Council for Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Graduate Record Examination Board (GRE; Okahana & Zhou, 2017), 1.8 million individuals entered graduate programs as first-time and continuing students for the fall 2016 semester. Specifically, 25.8% (just slightly less than half of a million) of those individuals entered into doctoral degree programs; whereas 74.2%
(approximately 1.3 million) entered into master's degree programs (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). Also, based on these 625 institutions, the total graduate student enrollment for African American/Blacks for fall 2016 was 184,235 (12.4%) compared to 907,740 (60.9%) total graduate student enrollment for Whites (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). In addition, graduate enrollment for African American/Black students decreased by 1.7% between fall 2015 and fall 2016 (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). According to the Council for Graduate Schools (2010), the majority of graduate enrollment has been women since the mid-1980's, and the steady enrollment can be attributed to the high number of women pursuing master's degrees in the field of education. Approximately 57.5%, or over one million, graduate enrollments were women (Okahana & Zhou, 2017).

Persisting through graduate education can be difficult. In particular, graduate training for a doctoral degree has been described as an autonomous and isolating journey to produce scholarly work (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). According to the CGS (2010), not all graduate students who enter into graduate education, at the master's and doctoral level, finish their degree. While there has been an increase in students seeking doctoral degrees, approximately 50% of all doctoral students who enter graduate programs do not complete their program (Church, 2009; Lovitts, 2001). In a national report on the completion and attrition rates of minority doctoral students, African American/Black doctoral students, especially those in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) had a high attrition rate; approximately 38% of these students do not complete their programs (Sowell, Allum, & Okahana, 2015).

Attrition in graduate education is mostly unnoticeable within most graduate academic programs (Lovitts, 2001). A dissertation study, conducted by Lovitts (1996), focused on the experiences of doctoral students and causes of leaving their degree program prematurely. Lovitts' ultimately turned her dissertation into a book, *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and*
Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study (2001), which has become a seminal work for understanding attrition in doctoral education.

Lovitts (1996; 2001) found that doctoral students left their graduate program due to personal reasons, academic reasons, and financial reasons. Personal difficulties, included burnout, heavy workload, stress, family responsibilities, and pressure to meet expectations. Often, burnout is associated with work and job satisfaction. When a great deal of stress is experienced, especially on the job, a person may become dissatisfied, feel burned out, and ultimately be tempted to leave the job (Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009). While burnout effects those working, burnout can also affect students, especially graduate students who are in the helping profession (Clark et al., 2009). Academic concerns included program-student fit, not feeling integrated into the program or university community, student-advisor relationship, peer relationships, and program expectations (Lovitts, 1996; 2001). Financial reasons included lack of financial assistance, receiving another job offer, and not being able to meet financial responsibilities (Lovitts, 1996; 2001). Lovitts (1996; 2001) reported that no single reason encouraged doctoral students to leave their programs, but rather a combination of reasons contributed to their departure. After grouping participants' interview responses into standard categories, Lovitts (1996/2001) determined that the most cited reason for leaving the program was attributed to academic reasons, followed by personal reasons, and lastly financial reasons (Lovitts, 1996; 2001). There is an assumption that financial difficulties are the primary reason for leaving the program; however, financial reasons were the third most important reason for leaving (Lovitts, 1996; 2001).

Lovitts (2001) offers several reasons doctoral student attrition may remain unattended, including (a) the institutional and/or economic reward for maintaining high and consistent
enrollment, (b) the lack of structure of the first-year cohort, (c) the structure of the advising process, and (d) the way that doctoral students leave the program. To help with attrition and retention of graduate students, particularly for those in a doctoral program, nationally-funded programs, such as the Ph.D. Completion Project, have been implemented (Sowell, Allum, Okahana, 2015). However, given the continued high rate of attrition and special programs to help graduate students’ complete degrees, there still appear to be major obstacles occurring in the graduate school experience that hinder academic success and successful completion. Continuous surveying of graduate students' engagement throughout their time in their program is essential to make sure that programs are attuned to the issues that arise for graduate students.

The general landscape of graduate education can be a daunting experience coupled with difficult tasks, particularly at the doctoral level. Literature regarding master-level education and particularly master-level student experiences is limited. Graduate students are tasked with juggling multiple responsibilities, which can lead to burnout and stress. While all graduate students endure some challenges throughout their graduate education process, African American/Blacks graduate students experience unique challenges, such as race-related stress (Wilkinson, Kerr, Smith, Salaam, Flournoy, Magwood, Williams, & Glover, 2014).

**Graduate Student Experiences**

Graduate school can be a very labor-intensive and stressful environment (Strozier, Bowen, & Vogel, 2003). There are many challenges associated with being a graduate student including managing teaching responsibilities, conducting research, publishing scholarly work, finding employment, and managing relationships with advisors (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2006), all while completing coursework and maintaining a social life outside of school. Furthermore, there are numerous aspects of graduate studies that can be overwhelming such as
the number of requirements needed to complete the degree, financial strains and difficulties, academic workload, tensions on interpersonal relationships, and employment outlook for the profession (Rocha-Singh, 1994). In addition to traditional graduate academic programs, those programs with an emphasis on clinical/field training experiences (e.g., social work, psychology, and medical school) can be particularly strenuous on students due to their engagement of relational, emotional, and physical treatment of others (Strozier et al., 2003). Graduate school is an experience where one may have difficulties managing their schedules; however, programs with clinical or field training may add another layer of difficulty due to the position of being responsible for someone else. Thus, insight into what graduate students are facing during their program experience and how graduate students are handling situations is critical in order to implement programs and support mechanisms for graduate students to be successful. New information about graduate students' experience is warranted to revise current programs or to establish new programming that will accurately fit the needs of graduate students.

Research on educational experiences and academic success is plentiful, specifically regarding secondary education and undergraduate education. However, research on graduate education, as a whole, is limited and dated. All graduate students may face challenges during educational training; however, African American/Black graduate students may have particular difficulties adjusting to graduate school (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004). Some of those particular difficulties include lack of financial security, the need for off-campus employment to support self, and a lack of mentors, all which have a tremendous influence on the graduate school experience (Lewis et al. 2004). However, the literature regarding the experiences of African American/Black graduate students is sparse.
For African American/Black graduate students, the stressful experiences of graduate school can be heightened due to racial and cultural issues that occur on the campus and in the classrooms (Barker, 2011; Spivey-Mooring & Apprey, 2014; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). The demands of academic workload coupled with social issues, such as having a minority status, have an impact on the lives and experiences of African American/Black graduate students (Hall & Allen, 1982). Experiencing racism can impact a person's or group's well-being through the stress of racial tensions (Harrell, 2000). Specifically, racism-related stress can have adverse effects on a person's physical, psychological, social, functional, and spiritual well-being (Harrell, 2000). Racism-related stress can also impact coping strategies and support networks if such strategies and networks are not readily available (Harrell, 2000).

There are different forms of race-related experiences and stress, such as discrimination, isolation, and microaggressions (Harrell, 2000). Moreover, racial microaggressions may be the most critical race-related stress for racial and ethnic minority students, potentially causing a significant amount of psychological distress (Clark et al., 2012; Roberts, 2013). Racial microaggressions can be described as subtle and brief verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile and negative racial slights towards people of color (Sue et al., 2007). This can become taxing as a person may overthink an encounter. To illustrate the potential impact of race-related experiences on African American/Black graduate students, several studies focusing on African American/Black graduate students will be detailed. These studies were chosen based on their qualitative method to explore the underlying experiences that Black graduate students encounter in their graduate programs. Also, these studies shed light on the dynamics between program or campus interactions and their experiences as a racial and
ethnic minority. Finally, the samples included in these studies capture experiences of both master’s and doctoral level students.

**Race-Related Experiences of Graduate Students**

Torres and colleagues (2010) investigated racial microaggressions and psychological functioning in current African American doctoral students and recent graduates. Using a mix-method design, Torres et al. (2010) first conducted a qualitative study to identify the type of microaggressions experienced by high-achieving African Americans. This sample consisted of 97 African Americans (76% women) with an average age of 36. Approximately half of the sample was single, and 63% did not have any children. Of the sample, 47% had obtained a doctoral degree, and 55% were currently enrolled in a doctoral program (Torres et al., 2010). The findings of the qualitative study indicated three types of racial microaggressions experienced by the sample: assumptions of criminality/being treated as a second-class citizen, underestimation of personal abilities, and cultural/racial isolations (Torres et al., 2010). Assumptions of criminality/being treated as a second-class citizen was the thought that a person of color was doing something illegal or was viewed as being less important than others (Torres et al., 2010). Underestimation of personal abilities entails negative perceptions about the academic ability of a person of color (Torres et al., 2010). Finally, cultural/racial isolation was the extent that someone was being singled out due to their race and lack of same-race acquaintances (Torres et al., 2010).

Torres’ and colleagues’ (2010) then used a separate sample to study examined the longitudinal effects of racial microaggressions on mental health based on the findings of the qualitative study. This new sample consisted of 174 African American doctoral students and recent graduates. However, only 107 participants completed the survey at both time points. Of this sample, 84.9% were women with an average age of 30.44 (Torres et al., 2010). About 70%
of the participants indicated they were single, with 24.5% reported being married. Of all the participants, 92.4% were receiving or had received their doctoral training at predominately White institutions, 5.7% were receiving or had received their doctoral training from a predominately African American institution, and 1.9% were receiving or had received their doctoral training from an institution that was identified as neither predominately White or African American institution (Torres et al., 2010). Finally, about 34% of the sample indicated that their primary doctoral advisor was of the same ethnic background (Torres et al., 2010). Participants of this study were asked to complete a survey packet consisting of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), the Daily Life Experience-Frequency Scale (Harrell, 1994), the Behavioral Attribute of Psychosocial Competence – Condensed Form (BAPC-C; Zea, Reisen, & Tyler, 1996), and The Center of Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Surveys were completed at two times, one year apart. The findings indicated that underestimation of personal abilities was related to higher perceived stress level and more significant symptoms of depression (Torres et al., 2010). Moreover, the researchers found that participants that had a high active coping style experienced less perceived stress compared to those with a low active coping style. However, the authors did not address the specific coping mechanisms participants employed.

Lewis et al. (2004) conducted a qualitative study using retrospective interviews, exploring the experiences of eight African American doctoral students and barriers towards completion of the degree. Of the sample, five were female, and three were male (Lewis et al., 2004). The sample was recruited from a Carnegie research-level one, a predominantly White institution in the Midwest region of the United States (Lewis et al., 2004). All participants were either current students or recent graduates in the field of education (Lewis et al., 2004). No other
socio-demographic information was reported. Several themes emerged regarding African American doctoral students' experiences, including feelings of isolation, standing out on campus and in the classroom, developing a relationship with peers, and negotiating the system on their own (Lewis et al., 2004). Participants' recount of feeling isolated on campus was the most prevalent theme. In addition, participants cited feeling isolated as a point of consideration for leaving the program (Lewis et al., 2004). Standing out on campus was the second most prevalent theme. Participants cited that diverse representation of other racial/ethnic minorities was absent and that there was a general lack of understanding of the needs of African American graduate students (Lewis et al., 2004). Another finding indicated that peer-relationships were notable among the participants; however, most of those relationships were formed with each other (Lewis et al., 2004). In general, findings from this study revealed that these particular African American doctoral students struggled to find their place on the campus and within their academic program (Lewis et al., 2004). However, the research did not explicitly talk about how African American doctoral students coped or how they sought help.

Gasman, Hirschfeld, and Vultaggio (2008) examined the experiences of African American/Black graduate students at an Ivy League institution. Forty African American/Black graduates in master-level and doctoral level (Ed.D. and Ph.D.) education programs completed an online survey comprised of eight closed-ended and 29 open-ended questions (Gasman et al., 2008). Of the sample, 45% were master's students and 55% were doctoral students. Regarding socioeconomic status, 68% of the sample came from middle-class families, 30% of the sample came from homes below the poverty line, and 2% of the sample came from working-class families (Gasman et al., 2008). Forty-eight percent of the participants had at least one parent who had graduated from college, while only 2% of the sample had parents who attended graduate
school. The remaining 50% had parents with a high school education (Gasman et al., 2008). The findings of this qualitative study revealed themes about mentorship and advising, peer support, academic isolation, financial stress, and spirituality (Gasman et al., 2008). Participants also indicated that the first year of graduate school was difficult, frustrating, expensive, and rewarding at the same time (Gasman et al., 2008). One of the questions asked the participants to describe themselves in only three words. The findings revealed the most common answers were spiritual, driven, intelligent, and committed (Gasman et al., 2008). Two common responses from several participants were that there were no support systems in place and negative experiences with advisors (Gasman et al., 2008). Also, participants commented that their curriculum was primarily grounded in a Eurocentric worldview (Gasman et al., 2008). Finally, the participants cited that their spirituality was a central aspect to their survival of graduate school and they relied on the support of the church (Gasman et al., 2008).

Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) conducted a qualitative study that explored the everyday experiences of Black and Latino/a doctoral students from three research-intensive, predominantly White institutions. The institutions were chosen based on the Carnegie Classification System and located in the West, Midwest, and Northeast regions of the United States (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). The sample included 22 doctoral students (8 Latino/a and 14 Black) and an almost even distribution of male (n=12) and female (n=10) participants. The majority of students (77%) were in the field of education, while the remaining 23% were in other fields (e.g., psychology, statistics, agriculture). Gildersleeve et al. (2011) used a qualitative method of ethnographic interviews with participants. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT values the narratives and lived experiences of people of color, particularly those voices who are not heard in the realm of education and provides counter-
narratives to the dominant opinion (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). As a result, several themes emerged based on interviews with the participants. These themes include socialization, racial aggressions, self-censorship, questioning worth and ability, issues with scholarly endeavors, and peer networks (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). One core shared experience expressed by the participants was a question of "Am I going crazy."

The idea of "Am I going crazy?", was seen as the common narrative from which all other participant ideas flowed. This particular narrative is conceptualized as doctoral students of color, specifically Black and Latino/a experience of insecurities, hesitancies, and doubt about their being in their programs (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Also, the "Am I going crazy?" narrative taps into the struggle that Black and Latino/a doctoral students experience every day as they navigate between struggle and resilience (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Finally, this narrative is a daily question that Black and Latino doctoral students pose to themselves of whether their experiences of racial interactions are accurate or an over-exaggeration.

Participants discussed their socialization experiences in their program and expressed the difficulties of not connecting with advisors and supervisors, or being fully understood by faculty in their programs and assistantships (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Also, racial aggressions were everyday occurrences impacting participants. Specifically, Black and Latino/a doctoral students are often the only student of color in the classroom and can be put in positions to be viewed as the spokesperson for their race (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). The theme of self-censorship emerged for Black and Latino/a doctoral students as they described the need to decide whether to acknowledge racial incidents and to engage in difficult dialogues related to their perspectives as Black and Latino/a people (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Self-censorship can serve as a mechanism to protect overall well-being from the impact of engaging in racial incidents. Participants further
recounted commonly questioning their worth and ability as they navigated their doctoral programs. More specifically, participants often had thoughts about the legitimacy of being in their doctoral programs and the capabilities of performing well with the work that they are presented (Gildersleeve et al., 2011).

Adjusting to the rules and norms of their graduate program was another common experience discussed by participants. Specifically, participants expressed being told by other students how one should go about navigating their doctoral programs and how to engage with professors (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). As Black and Latino/a doctoral students, the participants shared their experience of being stifled by scholarly endeavors. Notably, the participants described experiences of not being in a program that engaged in research related to racial and ethnic minorities (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Finally, peer networks were an essential feature for participants as a means of getting through their program. With peers, they found comfort in forming their groups to express themselves and feel validated by other students of color (Gildersleeve et al., 2011).

Summary

There is a small body of work that investigates the experiences of African American/Black graduate students, particularly doctoral students. Throughout this research, it is evident that African American/Black doctoral students have many unique experiences that make their journey through graduate school difficult. Specifically, Black doctoral students have difficulties with engagement with faculty and peers, navigating the spaces of the campus, being the only student of color in the program or the classroom, and figuring out how to handle microaggressions. It is important to note that stressful situations and environmental factors described in these studies are not just isolated incidents or one time experiences, but instead are
daily and continuous experiences. Existing studies often provide recommendations for the programs and university personnel to improve structures to make the experiences of Black doctoral students better. However, these studies have not explored the general stressors that Black graduate students face, and have focused solely on doctoral students. Furthermore, these studies have not fully captured how graduate students think about these daily challenges or what mechanisms Black graduate students engage to cope. By understanding more about coping for Black graduate students, and in particular how stress is appraised to move into coping, program and university personnel can make more effective interventions that may be helpful with retention and persistence.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research about graduate education and the experiences of graduate students is limited but growing. Graduate education is now shifting to become the standard in educational attainment, as bachelor degrees are no longer competitive in today's growing economy. While there has been a steady increase of people entering graduate school, especially at the doctoral level, attrition has been and remains a prominent issue in doctoral education (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Di Pierro, 2007). More information is needed to understand student experiences at the master-level and doctoral-level that has kept an attrition rate of about 50% constant for the last few decades (Di Pierro, 2007). Furthermore, there is a need to examine various barriers and trends that occur during graduate education to prevent underrepresentation and lack of completion across racial groups, particularly for African American/Black students. (Neville & Chen, 2007).

In general, the literature on graduate students, particularly doctoral students, tends to concentrate on negative mental and emotional experiences, such as anxiety, depression, and
stress (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Hadjoannou et al., 2007), self-care and self-worth (e.g., Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006), and physical health (e.g., Kernan, Borgart, & Wheat, 2011) during graduate study. Some studies (e.g., Burkhart, 2014; Dearing, Maddux, & Tangney, 2005; El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Rummell, 2015; Schwartz-Mette, 2009) focus exclusively on clinical and/or counseling psychology graduate students' and their experiences of mental health issues and help-seeking attitudes. In most existing studies that include African American/Black graduate students, the sample sizes are extremely small. However, there are very few studies that focus exclusively on African American/Black graduate students and their experiences in graduate school.

African American/Black graduate students are entering graduate programs at an increasing rate; however, an alarming rate of African American/Black graduate students are not graduating from their degree programs (Allum, 2014). African American/Black graduate students face unique stressors in graduate school that include race-related issues and stressors stemming from the environmental and social climates of the campus. Studies focused on African American/Black graduate students have been mostly qualitative studies. Qualitative research is quite relevant, as it provides an in-depth approach to analyzing an individual's lived experiences and garners a sense of meaning related to a particular phenomenon. On the other hand, quantitative research can also be helpful to provide information on the nature of the relationships among multiple ideas and to provide findings applicable to a broader, more generalizable audience (Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009).

While a few studies have explored the experiences of African American/Black graduate students (e.g., social interactions among peers, faculty, and university personnel) and how they navigate through their graduate school experiences, no studies have been identified that
specifically examine the connections between stress and coping for African American/Black graduate students. In the broader psychological literature, experiences of stress are understood in the relationship to coping strategies, appraisals of stress, and help-seeking intentions. Understanding the experiences of stress, coping strategies, appraisals of stress and help-seeking for African American/Black graduate students is an important aspect to add to the small, but growing literature. Specifically, gaining knowledge about how African American/Black graduate students think about stress and respond when faced with stressful situations during their graduate program is critical. Also, learning about when and from whom African American/Black graduate students seek help can be beneficial to university programs and university personnel. This may have implications for departments and universities to understand better the academic and social interactions of African American/Black graduate students face to help with retention and persistence. More importantly, this understanding can be useful towards efforts to ensure academic success, degree completion, and promote overall well-being for African American/Black graduate students.

The current study will examine the relationships among stress, coping strategies, appraisals of stress, and help-seeking intentions for African American/Black graduate students. The next chapter, Chapter II, will introduce and review several theories that are related to stress and coping. Chapter II will also examine coping strategies that are unique to African American/Blacks. Finally, the chapter will explore literature on the help-seeking process among the general public, specific to African American/Blacks, and specific to African American college students.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into four sections related to stress and coping. These sections provide an overview of theories and models of stress and coping, coping strategies used by African Americans, the help-seeking process, and the purpose of the study. The first section includes the theoretical frameworks that align with the purpose of this study. Three frameworks are discussed in this section, the Integrative Model of Stress and Coping (Moos, 1984; Chun, Moos, & Cronkit, 2006), Africentric Psychological Theory (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The second section covers topics regarding coping strategies that are particular to African Americans. The third section focuses on the help-seeking process, various kinds of help-seeking, and barriers to seeking help. Finally, the purpose of this study is explained in the final section.

Theoretical Framework

Many conceptual and theoretical frameworks explain the experiences of stress and coping. Three theories that incorporate understanding of culture and context provide the framework for this study. Moos' (1984) Integrative Model of Stress and Coping is reviewed first. Review of Moos' (1984) model includes discussion of specific cultural contexts that deepen the understanding of human and social contexts related to stress and coping (Chun et al., 2006). Second, the Africentric Psychological Theory (Utsey et al., 2000) is described to provide a specific cultural context for African American coping as it relates to stressful situations. Finally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) is presented to facilitate an understanding of factors that may influence an individual to carry out specific behaviors, such as coping strategies and help-seeking intentions. Taken together, this set of theories map out the movement from
stress experience to the evaluation of a coping response, and from intent to the performance of a particular behavior that may alleviate a stressful situation.

**Integrative Model of Stress and Coping**

Moos’ (1984) Integrative Model of Stress and Coping expands on Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) seminal theory of transactional stress and coping which is based on the dynamic relationship between an individual, demands from the environment in which they are operating, and the individual’s ability to respond to those demands (Cash & Gardner, 2011; Lehman, 1972). Moreover, the theory specifically focuses on the role of cognitive appraisals in determining experiences of stress and coping. Moos' (1984) integrative model of stress and coping expands explicitly on the work of Lazarus and Folkman by emphasizing the role of social climate and the importance of understanding unique, underlying human contexts. Moos (1984) initially sought to understand how these human contexts can be understood in environmental systems and later (Chun, Moos, and Cronkite, 2006) added emphasis on culture based on individualistic and collectivistic ideologies of a person and environment interaction. The focus on cultural experiences is particularly germane to this study and will be introduced first. Next, a detailed discussion of the stress and coping model as theorized by Moos (1984), with cultural relevance added by Chun et al. (2006), is provided.

**The Influence of Culture**

Culture is one of the most fundamental elements of a society that shapes a person and the environment (Chun et al., 2006). Culture can be defined as a system of norms, beliefs, and values that inform behaviors and are transmitted through generations (Chun et al., 2006; Triandis, 2007). The most widely studied aspects of culture are related to the idea of individualism and collectivism (Chun et al., 2006). Those groups of people who identify more with individualism
recognize the self as the primary unit of society; whereas those from collectivistic worldviews see their group as the primary unit of society (Chun et al., 2006). Culture, in terms of the individualistic or collectivistic characteristics, has strong influences on the social climate and environment (Chun et al., 2006). Furthermore, the cultural context of the environment can determine the type of social resources that are available to help individuals cope. Also, culture has a significant impact on the personal system, including personality, motivations, and attributions a person displays (Chun et al., 2006).

Cultural attitudes and social factors can also shape the events that are deemed as typical in society and those events that are viewed as demanding. Moreover, cultural beliefs, norms, and values can influence a person’s cognitive appraisal of stressful situations and the choice of coping mechanisms (Chun et al., 2006). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), a cognitive appraisal is the evaluation process a person undergoes to determine what, if any, coping strategies can be helpful in the stressful situations. Finally, culture can impact how a person defines socially appropriate, acceptable, and normative ways of experiencing stressful situations (Chun et al., 2006). Furthermore, the concept of culture is best understood as being a part of the macro-social or ecological system of the environment that influences stress and coping (Chun et al., 2006). In other words, the experience of stress can be conceptualized based on the macro-level idea of the culture of a particular setting. Whereas coping encompasses a micro-level idea of culture based on personal, individual values.

The cultural context people subscribe to may have an impact on how they think about stress, experience stress, and decide how to cope with stressful situations. In addition, culture appears to play a role in human context at two levels (Chun et al., 2006). The first level is the cultural ideologies of the individual and how they view themselves in relation to society. The
second level is the culture of the setting (e.g., school, employment, organization) of which the person is a part. Together, the intersection of the person and the setting based on cultural values or norms can have implications for the interpretation and response to stress. Moos's (1984) model of stress and coping provides a framework of how some aspects of culture are integrated into the response and decision making a process for coping with stress.

**Moos’ Integrative Model of Stress and Coping**

Following Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) original model, Moos (1984, 2002) maintained that there was a significant environment and personal interaction that occurs with stress and coping, but sought to highlight further the contextual and cultural aspects of person-environment interaction. Stress is defined in a relational capacity as the discrepancy between the demands of the environment and the person’s ability to respond to those demands (Cash & Gardner, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lehman, 1972). Thus, experiences of stressful demands depend on the environmental circumstances and a person’s vulnerability to that environment (Lazarus, 1999/2006). To underscore the person-environment interaction, Moos’ (1984, 2002) proposed five panels in the integrative model: Environmental System (I), Personal System (II), Transitory Conditions (III), Cognitive Appraisal and Coping (IV), and Health and Well-being (V). These five panels can be best understood as domains for the stress and coping process. Contextual and cultural elements are embedded in each panel through consideration of the cultural dynamics of the setting and personal characteristics as influenced by culture.

**Environmental System (Panel I)**

The environmental system (Panel I) encompasses physical features, institutional and program factors, social climate, on-going stressors, social resources, and a composite of unique factors within a setting (Moos, 1984). Also, the environmental system is relatively stable, with
little changes occurring in how the system functions (Moos, 2002). The environmental system can provide clues on how a person should behave and interact based on the norm that is set by the collective of individuals who are a part of a particular setting on a daily basis. Specifically, relevant to the environmental systems and on-going stressors that can occur, the cultural context becomes essential when noting the availability of social resources (Chun et al., 2006). This draws attention back to the idea of individualism and collectivism. There may be pressures from both sides, individualistic or collectivistic, of how one should use social resources (Chun et al., 2006). In other words, how a person navigates an environment depends on whether the culture of that environment values independence and autonomy or the collective efforts of family, friends, or co-workers (Chun et al., 2006).

In terms of an educational setting, such as a university or a particular department on campus, there could be social cues that aid in understanding the context of how people within this environment operate. As mentioned previously in the introduction section of this study, graduate education and the graduate school experience have a relatively stable set of institutional/program factors, a particular social climate that reflects educational endeavors, and on-going stressors. In particular, at the doctoral and professional degree levels, graduate education can be quite isolating and not allow for the collective moments to occur. Thus understanding the environment of graduate programs can be important to understanding how students may respond to stress and cope.

**The Personal System (Panel II)**

The personal system (Panel II) entails characteristics of individuals, such as socio-demographic factors, self-esteem and confidence, problem-solving abilities, cognitive skills, and health status (Moos, 1984, 2002). Socio-demographic factors include, but are not limited to, race,
gender, age, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, educational level, physical ability, and nationality. Culture plays a vital role on the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components of the person (Chun et al., 2006). Particularly, cultural norms for specific groups of people can have an influence on how a person thinks about things, their way of being and doing things, and how they feel. In addition, a person's self-concept, personality traits, attribution, and motivation are essential aspects regarding understanding how culture is infused in the personal systems (Chun et al., 2006).

Gaining insight into how a person defines him- or herself in an environment is a gateway to understanding varying cultural contexts. Moreover, how a person defines themselves within individualistic or collectivistic attitudes has implications for how they respond to or resist situations that occur in their environment (Chun et al., 2006). Specifically, a person who may align more with individualistic ideals may view themselves as the primary entity within a space, be more self-reliant, and define themselves as an outlier from the larger group (Chun et al., 2006). Thus, when a situation occurs, the person with the individualistic attitude may be more likely to try to assess and handle the situation on their own. However, those individuals who identify through a collectivistic lens may define themselves with consideration of the group or team of people around them (Chun et al., 2006).

In addition to how a person defines themselves, the extent to which one believes they have control over situations that happen in their lives can also be seen as a cultural characteristic (Chun et al., 2006). Specifically, individualistic and collectivistic lenses differ in terms of what the person feels they control (internal locus of control) versus what they feel outside forces control (external locus of control). In addition to personality characteristics, these attributions play a crucial role in how a person evaluates the cause of a situation. Specific to the idea of
culture, a person with an individualistic mindset would likely point the cause of an event to themselves or others, whereas a person with a collectivistic-mindset would point the cause to outside situational/contextual factors (Chun et al., 2006).

Finally, motivation is another factor that can influence the stress and coping process for individuals (Chun et al., 2006). The cultural aspect of motivation is situated in the way in which people are socialized to demonstrate motivational patterns, such as self-reliance or reliance on others for motivation (Chun et al., 2006). Motivation is based on the idea that people have a tendency to be motivated towards increasing pleasure and minimizing pain (Chun et al., 2006). In addition, it has been postulated by Higgins (1997) that people have motivational regulatory foci – prevention and promotion. The promotion focus is where a person is guided by what they would like to do and work towards that goal. However, prevention focus is when a person is being directed by obligations to others or the self and works to meet those obligations (Chun et al., 2006).

It appears that personality characteristics, self-concept, and socialization of how one is motivated are a critical component of the overall personal system (Panel II). The personal system seems to encompass many idiosyncrasies of a person. While the individual characteristics of a person shape the way in which stress and coping are viewed, there are general cultural components that also influence the stress and coping process. This has been argued by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the difficulty in researching stress and coping. Yet and still, understanding the personal system of a person can provide awareness to generally understanding the stress and coping.
The Transitory Conditions (Panel III)

Transitory Conditions (Panel III), include life stressors and events that occur, such as with work and family. Moos (1984, 2002) points out that the interactions between environmental systems (Panel I), personal systems (Panel II), and transitory conditions (Panel III) can influence social network resources and the ways an individual chooses to cope. Also, cultural factors can have direct and immediate influences on transitory life stressors and events (Chun et al., 2006). Life stressors can include family stress, financial difficulties, loss of employment, health issues, and racism (Chun et al., 2006). Moreover, cultural attitudes can shape how a person takes on these various life stressors. People who subscribe to individualistic or collectivistic values may experience stress in different manners. Specifically, people with individualistic values may view stressors as independent or interdependent. On the other hand, people with collectivistic values may view stressors based on change and constancy (Chun et al., 2006). Self-reliance, as valued in individualistic communities, can create stressors such as isolation and loneliness (Chun et al., 2006). However, in collectivistic communities, the idea of being mindful of how change or constancy would affect others can be stressful (Chun et al., 2006). Furthermore, the idea of change and constancy are essential to consider as culturally significant. Change is seen as progress and valued in an individualistic society, whereas change can disrupt stability and safety in collectivistic societies.

These different ways of thinking about stressors as independent versus interdependent and reflecting change versus constancy are incredibly relevant for African Americans who make the decision pursue graduate education. Often, there is a lack of financial security while in school and the sacrifice to not be close to family members due to receiving an education in another city. However, many African American graduate students are still responsible for family. The
environmental system (Panel 1; graduate school/program) and personal systems (panel II; individual characteristics) and transitory conditions (panel III; daily life and school stressors/events) can significantly impact how African American decide to cope, as mentioned by Moos (1984).

Cognitive Appraisal and Coping (Panel IV)

Cognitive appraisal and coping (Panel IV) are based on the premise that an individual evaluates a stressful situation, determines what is at stake, explores what can be done about the situation, and considers the consequences of the coping behaviors before actually employing the coping strategy (Chun et al., 2006; Moos, 2002).

Cognitive Appraisal

Consistent with the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), appraisal of the stressful situation is based on whether the stressor is considered to be harm/loss, threat, or challenge. During the appraisal state, the individual negotiates between two options: (a) wanting to view the stressful situation as one that they can cope with, and (b) wanting the best possible outcome for managing the stressful situation so as not to lose hope or positivity for moving forward (Lazarus, 2000). Moreover, cognitive appraisal has primary and secondary levels. Primary and secondary appraisal do not operate independently, instead reaching the point of the second appraisal is dependent on the primary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Primary appraisal consists of determining to what extent the situation that is occurring is relevant to the individual’s values, goal commitments, beliefs about self and the world, and situational intentions (Lazarus, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The fundamental question a person asks himself or herself during primary appraisal is whether or not something is wrong and, if so, what is at stake for them (Lazarus, 1999/2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Secondary
appraisal is concerned with what can be done about a negative person-environment interaction that is creating stress for the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Specifically, secondary appraisal is evaluative, assessing what coping strategies are available, the probability that the coping strategy will work, and the likelihood that the coping mechanism can be effectively applied. Furthermore, secondary appraisal encompasses four parts (1) a process of reaching some conclusion about what needs to be done, (2) determining how to best get the task done, (3) assessing the consequences of action, and (4) ultimately making a decision to act (Lazarus, 2000).

The cultural connection to cognitive appraisal, based on Moos' (1984) contextualization of individualistic versus collectivistic ideologies, is that those individuals who align themselves more on the individualistic frame of reference may tend to appraise stressors as a challenge (Chun et al., 2006). The challenge involves whether the person determines being able to handle the stressor and the ability for growth to occur for the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). On the other hand, those with a collectivistic frame of reference may tend to appraise stressors as a threat (Chun et al., 2006). The threat that occurs is manifested in a sense of harm or loss to the greater community that is felt for the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Coping**

Consistent with Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is defined in this theory as cognitive and behavioral efforts that are continuously changing to manage specific environmental demands that are evaluated as exceeding a one’s resources. There are two forms of coping: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping is centered on defining what the problem is, coming up with multiple solutions, doing a cost-benefit analysis, choosing what to do, and then acting on that decision (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-
focused coping processes are used to hold on to hope and to have a positive outlook on stressful transactions; however, this process can also allow the person to deny what is happening, refuse to acknowledge the stress, and think that the stress does not matter (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The desired outcome a person hopes to have for relieving a stressful event is defined as the coping goal (Chun et al., 2006). Coping can also be considered a process comprised of three main components. The first component is based on what a person actually does versus what a person usually does or would do (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The second component of the coping process is concerned with examining what a person does in a specific context. Finally, the third component involves the idea of change in thoughts and actions as stressful situations occur (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, the coping mechanisms employed require ongoing cognitive appraisals and will vary depending on the requirement of each threat and the adaptation significance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). With culture as the focal point for coping goals, Chun et al., (2006) considers four aspects: (a) the needs of self versus others, (b) autonomy and independence versus relatedness and interdependence, (c) control of external environment versus internal self, and (d) gain versus loss. Coping strategies that are used will differ based upon whether a person employs a more individualist or collectivist lens. Specifically, Chun et al., (2006) postulate that those from individualistic references tends to confront and approach the stressful situation with active coping because of the stressor being viewed as a challenge, whereas those from a collectivistic reference have a tendency to avoid the stressful situation with less active coping because the stressor is viewed as a threat.

Health and Well-being (Panel V)

The final panel, health, and well-being (Panel V) encompasses how the interactions among all the panels have beneficial or detrimental effects on the individual's health and well-
being (Moos 1984, 2002). Moos' (1984) model of stress and coping contends that in conjunction with the personal system, the ongoing contexts of the environmental system influences the occurrences of transitional life events, as well as how an individual appraises and copes with the events and how they, in turn, affect the individual's overall health and well-being (Chun et al., 2006). Cultural attitudes and perspectives can ultimately shape how a person experiences and expresses moments of stress (Chun et al., 2006). Understanding how cultural factors, such as gender norm, stigma, and shame, determine coping outcomes is crucial for further understanding how and when coping strategies are used (Chun et al., 2006).

**Summary**

Moos' (1984, 2002) model of stress and coping with an emphasis on cultural context highlights the salience of examining external and internal factors that influence how stress is perceived and managed through coping. However, Moos' (1984, 2002) position is primarily taken from the idea of collectivism and individualism. One important consideration is the interaction between the environment (Panel I) and the person (Panel II) based on the cultural context of individualism and collectivism. The interaction could be a potential conflict when a person defines themselves by one set of ideals, such as collectivism, but the environment that they are a part of defines its social norms within a different set of ideals, such as individualism. Therefore, when stressful situations occur, understanding more specific aspects of cultural dynamics is vital regarding the experiences of stress and ways in which individuals manage stress through coping strategies. Specific to the purpose of this study is the understanding of cultural factors that are relevant to African Americans/Blacks and how they cope. This area of coping is critical to explore because African American/Blacks have different cultural beliefs.
ideologies, and values than the dominant culture, on which most stress and coping models have been based. Thus, the experience of stress and coping processes may be displayed differently.

Moos’ (1984, 2002) expansion of the transactional stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides a shift in including cultural factors as a critical component to understand the dynamics between stress and coping. Yet, the cultural position that has been added to Moos’ (1984) model by Chun et al. (2006) is limited in that it only includes culture from a macro-lens of how a person is shaped by larger societal context of individualism or collectivism. Many components make up culture, such as specific shared behaviors, language, community ties, belief systems, and attitudes, that may play a role in the stress and coping process. Specifically, how responses to stress and coping are employed may be different based on upon race. For this study, further exploration on the ideas of coping as it relates to Black people will be explored. The next section will explore the Africentric Psychology Theory which is one theory that discuss psychological factors, such as a stress and coping, anchored explicitly in the history and culture for those of African descent.

**Africentric Psychological Theory**

Africentric psychological theory was birthed out of indigenous African traditions that emphasize the engagement of the holistic conception of the human condition, which is considered to be an African-centered worldview perspective (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000). Specifically, the African-centered worldview lens is actively fixated on the interconnectedness between people, society, nature, and the universe (Dei, 1994). It is noted that people of African descent who subscribe to an African-centered worldview acknowledge spiritual and material realities and that knowledge of self is the basis for all knowledge (Plummer & Slane, 1996). Within the Africentric psychology perspective, several dimensions help to understand the core
values, beliefs, and behaviors of people of African descent (Belgrave & Allison, 2010; Utsey, Bolden, & Adams, 2000). These dimensions include spirituality, collectivism, time, morality, affect and emotions, verve and rhythm, and harmony with nature (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). It is important to note that these dimensions are not considered independent factors, but instead are interdependent in their manifestations.

Spirituality is a fundamental aspect that is considered and incorporated in every aspect of the individual’s life (Mattis & Watson, 2009). Collectivism, from the African-centered perspective, relies heavily on group dynamics rather than putting a sole focus on the individual. The value is placed on interpersonal relationships with others; collectivism helps to ensure survival of the group (Parham et al., 2000). Time, from the Africentric lens, is cyclical, flexible, and subjective, considering the past, present, and future (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). In African tradition, orality is the primary way in which information is passed down from generation to generation (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). The dimension of affect and emotion refers to the sensitivity of emotions for the self and for recognizing them in others (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Verve and rhythm speaks to the behavior and actions that are intended to be creative and rhythmic using multiple mediums, such as musical instruments and dancing (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Finally, balance and harmony are viewed as necessary for one's well-being, and a balance between mental, physical, and spiritual state is sought (Oshodi, 2012). Based on this frame of reference, when there is imbalance in life, then stress and disease occur (Utsey et al., 2000). Thus, for effective coping mechanisms to be used, harmony must be established throughout the life events, which are often considered as spiritual means coming through in physical forms (Utsey et al., 2000).
**Africultural Coping**

The conceptualizations of coping and the existing measures used to assess coping have been historically grounded in a Eurocentric, Westernized frame of reference (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). Although African Americans use similar coping strategies that Whites use, considerations towards specific and culturally relevant coping behaviors and strategies has not been adequately represented in the literature (Utsey et al., 2000). While Lazarus and Folkman (1984), and Moos (1984) take account of diverse aspects of culture, the models do not take into consideration specific cultural components that relate to race, stress and coping (Plummer & Slane, 1996).

Most often, existing coping instruments are used with racial and ethnic minority populations, although the development of these assessments are not normed on racial and ethnic minorities. As a result, there are a limited number of measures that assess coping behaviors in cultural contexts for African Americans (Greer, 2007). One well known coping instrument that has been developed for specific use and conceptualizations focused on African Americans is the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI; Utsey et al., 2000).

The ACSI is grounded in an African-centered framework and measures the unique coping strategies used by African Americans during stressful situations with the environment (Utsey et al., 2000). The development of the ACSI was established based on the premise of the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), and modeled after the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). The ASCI consists of four dimensions for coping for African Americans: (1) Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, (2) Spiritual-centered Coping, (3) Collective Coping, and (4) Ritual-Centered Coping (Utsey et al., 2000).
The first dimension of cognitive and emotional debriefing serves as an adaptive response to manage environmental stressors. The second dimension of spiritual-centered coping reflects the African-centered value of the relationship between the individual, the spiritual world, and the creator of the universe. The third dimension, collective coping, represents the group-centered activities that an individual would engage to cope and follows the African-centered philosophy of group above individual. Finally, the fourth dimension of ritual-centered coping relies on the coping process of performing rituals as a way to pay homage to ancestors, celebrate events, and acknowledge religious figures (Utsey et al., 2000).

Overall, cultural values for African Americans may serve as a protective factor that help to alleviate strenuous social and economic situations that significantly impact health disparities (Utsey, Bolden, Williams, Lee, Lanier, & Newsome, 2007). Africultural coping provides an opportunity for the individual to consider specific practices that touch on the elements of mind, body, and spirit, and those elements fusing together for the betterment of their overall well-being. While the theory of transactional stress and coping places an emphasis on the cognitive dimensions (primary and secondary appraisals) that lead to the decision to cope and how to cope, and there is a gateway to see how cultural values are particularly salient when it comes to ideologies on coping, the transactional model does not necessarily go in depth of how to put those coping strategies into action. When it comes to coping strategies, furthering understanding of the types of coping strategies (e.g., problem-focused or emotion-focused) people use is essential. Moving beyond the type of coping strategies used and the intentions to use them, to understanding the process a person undergoes to perform a coping strategy requires examination of actual behaviors.
The Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen (1985), seeks to understand the intentions a person has to perform a behavior. The theory focuses primarily on the process that one takes to perform some action or behavior. In addition, the theory of planned behavior could be viewed as having similar conceptual framework components to that of Moos (1984). Specifically, both theories have an evaluative or appraisal component towards performing some action (Ajzen, 1991; Moos, 1984). Furthermore, while Moos (1984) is concerned with the coping strategies that one considers when encountering stressful events, the theory of planned behavior focuses on the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Link, Robbins, Mancuso, & Charlson, 2005). Copings strategies may be considered broad categories of behaviors employed to respond to stress.

The theory of planned behavior, (Ajzen, 1985), intends to explain how individuals think about behaviors and perform behaviors. Specifically, Ajzen suggests that people hold certain beliefs about performing behaviors and use those beliefs to make informed decisions to carry out a behavior based on anticipated positive or negative consequences. The intentions of individuals are assumed to be related to motivational factors that influence behavior, such as the willpower to try and how much effort an individual is willing to give to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, Ajzen (1985) argues that intentions can only predict an individual's attempt to execute a behavior, not the actual behavioral performance. Intentions control actions; however, not every intention is executed as some are ignored, and some are modified to fit a particular situation (Ajzen, 1985). Many behaviors are performed in everyday life that take a person very minimal effort because of their repetitiveness, such as driving to school or brushing one's teeth (Ajzen, 1985). However, some behaviors require a person to be more thoughtful and intentional about
planning to carry out some behavior, and this is the foundation of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985).

The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The theory of reasoned action contends that people take information that is available to them and consider the possible implications of their actions (Ajzen, 1985). Furthermore, the theory of reasoned action states that a person's intention to perform a behavior is the direct predictor of the action they perform (Ajzen, 1985). Within the theory of reasoned action, two factors influence a person's intention to behave: personal (attitudes towards the behavior) and social (subjective norms; Ajzen, 1985). The personal influence is based on the process a person undergoes to evaluate whether carrying out the behavior is going to be positive or negative. The social influence is based on how a person perceives social pressure to carry out a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Also, the theory of reasoned action is focused on attitudes about behaviors and predicting behaviors, rather than understanding the varying intentions behind the behaviors (Ajzen, 1985). The ultimate extension from the theory of reasoned action to the theory of planned behavior is the emphasis on understanding a person's actual behavioral performance. Ajzen (1985) argued that predictions of behavior can be somewhat understood from intentions; however, intentions can change over time and only can predict the attempt to carry out a behavior.

Following some ideas of the theory of reasoned action, Ajzen (1985) viewed understanding the likelihood of actually performing a behavior based on the strengths of a person's attempt to behave in a particular manner and the degree to which a person feels they have control. Therefore, the more energy a person expends to perform a behavior and the greater sense of control a person believes they have, the more likely the person will achieve performing
the behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Also, Ajzen (1985) asserts that being able to have control from internal and external factors is associated with creating an adequate plan to achieve the behavioral goal.

Continuing from the theory of reasoned action, one of the critical elements of the theory of planned behavior is understanding what determines intentions. Ajzen (1991) postulates that planned behavior has three distinct beliefs systems: (1) behavioral, (2) normative, and (3) control. Furthermore, the theory of planned behavior has three components that determine intention based on the aforementioned belief systems, which include (1) attitudes towards the behavior, (2) subjective norm, and (3) perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Each belief, along with its related intention determinant will be explained further.

Attitudes towards the behavior refers to the extent to which one evaluates or appraises the behavior in question negatively or positively (Ajzen, 1991). Beliefs about a behavior are formed based off characteristics that become associated with that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The association of characteristics to a behavior is learned from interactions with others. Furthermore, each belief about a behavior develops into attitudes towards that behavior when it is linked to an inevitable outcome by carrying out the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Based on the outcome of the behavior, a person quickly understands behavior that is associated with a positive outcome and behaviors that are associated with an adverse outcome (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, the outcome or consequence of the behavior connects the attitudes that are formed (Ajzen, 1991).

Subjective norm is defined as the social pressures for the individual to perform or not perform the given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, Ajzen (1991) states that a person keeps in mind whether another person or group of people that hold importance either approve or disapprove of a particular behavior, which is the normative belief. Specifically, Ajzen (1991)
claims that the subjective norms formed by a person are based on the magnitude of the normative belief and the motivational extent a person is willing to comply based on the approval of the reference individual or group.

Perceived behavioral control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviors, and it takes into account past experiences and anticipated obstacles (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, control beliefs are often determined by a person's past experiences of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, information from other parties (e.g., friends, families, and environments) provide clues about control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). An important and fundamental aspect of this theory is that control beliefs and perceived behavioral control ultimately propel a person's intention and action (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, a critical factor in control is being aware of the resources and opportunities (Ajzen, 1991). Based on another set of calculations, Ajzen (1991) contends that perceived behavior control stems from a control belief and the power to perform or not perform the behavior across a number of essential control beliefs that have been gathered.

Summary

Overall, Ajzen (1991) posits that the when an individual has a positive attitude toward a behavior and a favorable assessment of the subjective norms, along with greater perceived control, the individual will have stronger intentions to perform the behavior. At its core, the theory contends that behavior is a function of salient information or beliefs that are relevant to the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). These salient beliefs coincide with the three determinants of action, namely that behavioral beliefs influence the attitudes toward behaviors, normative beliefs are predictive of subjective norms, and control beliefs provide the basis for perceptions of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior appears to focus mainly on beliefs
systems that stem from the individual. However, the theory of planned behavior does not go into
detail about the way in which contextual factors, such as identity, race, and culture, shape
individual beliefs and intent to perform specific behaviors. These contextual factors are
important to consider when seeking to understand how a person determines what behaviors are
appropriate for specific situations.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

This series of theoretical perspectives provide an overview of concepts that are related to
understanding the experiences of stress, a decision-making process about how the experiences of
stress are perceived, coping processes, behavioral intentions, and actions potentially carried out
by a person. The most useful feature of the theory of stress and coping is the decision-making
process a person goes through to determine a coping process after experiencing a stressful
encounter. Furthermore, one can see how culture can influence how a person experiences
stressful situations and thinks about the impact of those stressful situations to come up with a
coping strategy. Finally, the development of the theoretical framework moved from
consideration of coping strategies to understanding how a person may move from thinking about
employing some action, such as a coping strategy, to actually performing the coping strategy.
The importance and relevance of cultural contexts were highlighted in the theoretical framework.
However, culture was discussed broadly. More specific cultural experiences relevant to
particular cultural groups is warranted. To gain more understanding of the coping experience of
African American/Black graduate students, consideration of culturally-relevant coping strategies
is needed. A summary of the overlaps in theoretical ideas presented in the preceding discussion
is included in Table 1. The use of all of these theoretical perspectives is necessary because it
shows how each theory serves as a piece with distinct features that build upon the other and fill in the gaps to create the summative ideas concerning stress and coping.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Occurs as a result of an adverse interaction between person and environment</td>
<td>Occurs as a result of a negative interaction between person and environment, usually based on racial factors</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Appraisal</td>
<td>The evaluation process of what can or needs to be done to mitigate stress; two levels include primary and secondary</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Explains how an individual thinks about behaviors to make an informed decision to perform behaviors; three components include attitudes about behaviors, subjective norms, and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping/Action</td>
<td>The mechanism employed to relieve stress; cultural influences coping goals</td>
<td>There are culturally-specific types of coping strategies used</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Collectivism versus Individualism</td>
<td>Specific to cultural dimensions for people of African descent</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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**African American Coping Styles**

Overall, adopting an African-centered worldview means that one is conscious of the particular ways in which African Americans move about their environments and experience life
situations. The African-centered framework can point in a direction of embodying culturally relevant behaviors in order to establish the relationship between the person and the environment, primarily through various coping styles.

A qualitative study conducted by Conner et al. (2010) looked at the barriers to treatment and cultural coping strategies for older African American adults who were experiencing depression. As a result of interviews of with 37 older African Americans between the ages of 60 and 85, five major cultural themes appeared when discussing coping strategies for dealing with depression. The five cultural themes included (1) Self-Reliance strategies, (2) Frontin’, (3) Denial, (4) Language, and (5) Let Go and Let God. The self-reliance coping strategies fall under the premise that there is no need to seek treatment because one should be able to handle being depressed on their own (Connor et al., 2010). The idea of frontin’ meant that individuals would engage in behaviors in order hide their depressive symptoms. Individuals also chose denial as a coping strategy, where some individuals in this study denied their depression due to the role in the family and not wanting to bring worry to the family (Connor et al., 2010). Language as another means of coping with depression was employed by using different words to describe their experiences and what they were going through. Finally, the participants revealed that the most culturally appropriate coping mechanism for depression was relying on God (Conner et al., 2010).

Another study, by Gaylord-Harden and Cunningham (2009) examined African American youth coping strategies dealing with the internalization impact of racial discrimination. The study consisted of 268 (45% female), middle-school aged adolescents. The researchers assessed the sample using multiple measures of mainstream coping strategies (active, avoidant, distracting, and support-seeking), culturally-relevant coping strategies (spiritually-focused,
communalistic, and emotion-debriefing), life stressors, depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009). The first set of findings of the study revealed that there was no difference between females and males regarding experiences of discrimination. In addition, the study showed that this particular sample of African American youth experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety related to experiences of discrimination (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009). Regarding coping strategies, the study found that females endorsed more mainstream coping strategies (active, avoidant, and support-seeking) than males. However, males used more distracting mechanisms of the mainstream coping strategies (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009). Also, females endorsed using more culturally-relevant coping strategies than males. Furthermore, the results indicated that more culturally-relevant coping strategies were used than mainstream coping with regard to experiences of discrimination stress. Finally, the findings suggest that as experiences of discrimination increase, symptoms of anxiety also increase, which leads to the use of high communalistic coping.

Hoggard, Byrd, and Sellers (2012) explored the coping mechanisms between racially and nonracially contextualized events among African American college students. Participants from two predominately White institutions and one historically Black college (N = 663) completed measures on racial hassles, perceived stress, coping strategies, and appraisals. In addition, the researchers also had participants write descriptions of racially stressful events that they encountered. The duration of the study was 20 days, with participants completing the surveys and written response each day. The results of this study indicated this sample did not differ in their appraisals of racially stressful situations compared to nonracially stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012). The researchers wanted to understand how African American college students coped with racially stressful events versus nonracially stressful events. The results indicated that
these students coped with racially stressful events with more avoidant and ruminative coping, along with less plans for problem-solving than nonracially stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012). In addition, participants of this sample tended to use more confrontive coping mechanisms with racially stressful events than nonracially stressful events. However, what it is still not understood is how African Americans decide to use specific coping strategies for specific situations.

Summary

It is evident that African Americans use coping strategies when dealing with stressful situations. Furthermore, studies suggest that African Americans employ various coping strategies based on context and/or cultural relevance. Keeping peace with the environment, the community, and with oneself is an essential factor in the way in which African Americans see the world and also manage daily life. The use of spirituality and religious engagement is one way that the harmony is preserved. However, what is still not clear is under what circumstances culturally-relevant coping styles are used. In situations where racial stressors or general stressors are present, African Americans may employ African-centered protective coping strategies that may buffer against stressors such as the portrayals of the Strong Black Woman and The Cool Pose.

The Strong Black Woman

Black womanhood is defined by the quality of high strength (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). While strength can be considered as a positive characteristic, possessing strength poses a dilemma: to either choose a noble appearance to please others and remain genuinely unknown to people, or to choose walking in personal truth and risk being disregarded by people (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Thus, there is a mismatch that Black women commonly face regarding the expectations between self-assessment and outward self-presentation, that is to be even more
capable and less vulnerable (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Regular dimensions of the Black woman’s experience of possessing strength include continually agreeing to more labor-intensive tasks, having no one to talk to about her experiences, and suppressing emotions of doubt, anger, and frustrations (Beauboeuf-Lofontant, 2009). However, the idea of strength appears to be a culturally generated as a means for protecting Black women against a life full of obstacles due to their race and their gender (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

The notion of the strong Black woman (SBW), and its distinctive trait of strength, can have its roots traced back to the times of slavery and became apparent in other socio-historical periods as a means of survival (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014; Beaufboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; West, Donovan, & Daniel, 2016). Furthermore, the notion of what it means to be a strong Black woman and examples of how that is manifested is passed down through the generations of mothers (Abrams et al., 2014; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harrington, Crowther, & Shipherd, 2010).

Based on intense demands placed on Black women by a White-dominated society and living in a patriarchal Black community, the Black woman's ability to cope served as a catalyst to create a form of self-protection of an inner life from the majority of the problematic everyday experiences, responsibilities, and interaction (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Black women often think of themselves as being the sole person in charge to maintain families and whole communities; thus, this perception necessitates the defensive denial of pain, vulnerability, and suffering (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harrington et al., 2010). Black women are pressured to manage both stressors and their stress response on their own (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Strong Black women learn to minimize their feelings, wants, and desires to accommodate the needs of others (Holmes, White, Mills, & Mikel, 2011). Furthermore, the cultural edict demands
that Black women tirelessly support others to the detriment of self (Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Holmes et al., 2011). Black women who tend to endorse SBW may often feel that they must live up to the expectation of invincibility even in the face of significant stress. The strong Black woman is perceived as naturally resilient, able to handle stress, upsets, and trauma that life throws at her with relative ease (Donovan & West, 2015; Harris-Lacewell, 2001). The strong Black woman tends to work tirelessly and without complaint, always able to do more even if what is asked seems impossible to accomplish (Donovan & West, 2015).

A qualitative study, consisting of 44 Black women, ages 18 to 91, examined the characteristics of a Strong Black woman (Abrams et al., 2014). Based on the findings of four focus groups, four significant themes appeared: (1) displaying of multiple forms of strength, (2) having ethnic- and self-pride with intersectional oppression, (3) embracing being every woman, and (4) being anchored by religion/spirituality (Abrams et al., 2014). The majority of participants revealed that strong Black women display multiple forms of strength, which were cited as being independent, resilient, and possessing leadership skills (Abrams et al., 2014). Being able to display various forms of strength was the primary theme of the participants. Concerning having self- and ethnic-pride, the participants explained that being confident and proud of being Black and being a woman is essential to being a strong Black woman (Abrams et al., 2014). When speaking of embracing every woman, the participants disclosed that a strong Black woman can wear many hats, such as being a provider, a caretaker, and stay at home mom at the same time without complaints (Abrams et al., 2014). Finally, the participants indicated that being connected to a higher power allows the strong Black woman to be empowered and unrelenting (Abrams et al., 2014). Also, the participants indicated that the strong Black woman seeks a higher power for
guidance, strength, and wisdom (Abrams et al., 2014). The findings of this study helped to shed more light on the concept of the Strong Black Woman.

Donovan and West (2015) investigated the endorsement of the strong Black woman stereotype and its relationship to stress and mental health (e.g., symptoms of anxiety and depression) in a sample of 92 Black women college students. To assess depression, anxiety, and stress, Donovan, and West (2015) used the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and the Stereotypic Roles for Black Women Scale (SRBWS; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). The results of the study indicated a strong, positive relationship between stress and depressive symptoms, as well as between stress and anxiety symptoms (Donovan & West, 2015). The findings further suggested that SBW did not impact the relationship between stress and anxiety symptoms. However, SBW did impact that relationship between stress and depressive systems (Donovan & West, 2015). In other words, Black women who endorse SBW characteristics were more likely to experience depressive symptoms as a result of stress (Donovan & West, 2015).

Watson and Hunter (2015) examined the SBW schema, anxiety and depression, and psychological help-seeking for African American women. In a sample of 95 African American women, ages 18 to 65, the author's assessed psychological distress level, level of endorsement for the SBW stereotype, and help-seeking attitudes. Watson and Hunter (2015) developed four hypotheses: (1) higher endorsement of SBW would predict higher levels of anxiety and depression, (2) low levels of stigma indifference, low psychological openness, and low help-seeking propensity with the endorsement of SBW would increase anxiety and depression, (3) high levels of stigma indifference, high psychological openness, and high help-seeking
propensity with the endorsement of SBW would decrease anxiety and depression, and (4) positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking would predict less anxiety and depression. The findings of the study suggested that African American women in this sample who endorsed the SBW-schema also endorsed having increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, African American women tended to hold unfavorable attitudes toward seeking psychological help when endorsing the SBW schema (Watson & Hunter, 2015). Also, the findings revealed that indifference to stigma did predict anxiety, whereas psychological openness and help-seeking propensity did not. The cultural phenomenon of the Strong Black Woman has historically been used as a coping mechanism for African American women. However, research aimed at further understanding the notion of the SBW has indicated there are both positive and negative outcomes of identifying with this particular archetype.

Summary

The research on SBW concerning health, coping, and stress has been limited but is beginning to emerge (West et al., 2016). SBW can be two sides of the same coin regarding what it represents. SBW has the potential to serve as a definite form of coping and a protective factor for mental health, however, it can also serve as a negative form of coping and a risk factor for mental health (Harris-Lacewell, 2001; West et al., 2016). Empirical research regarding the utility of the Strong Black Woman archetype is in its infancy. More research is needed to understand how the Strong Black Woman archetype manifests in different domains of life for African American women.

The Cool Pose

The idea of a cool pose can also be traced back to slavery and was recognized by the slaves as a means to survive the harsh conditions (Majors & Billson, 1992). Cool pose is a
unique coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that Black men encounter on a daily basis (Majors & Billson, 1992). The cool pose is a "ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control" (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 4). Cool pose for Black men is situated in masculinity and serves as a strategic identity performance to help make sense of their daily lives (Griffin, 2011; Majors & Billson, 1992).

The idea of the identity performance is that its purpose is to communicate something in nature and that individuals who choose to undergo impression management to communicate a particular identity would be considered as more acceptable (Griffin, 2011). To manage a particular impression to communicate with others, Black men tend to use a variety of disguises (Majors & Billson, 1992). Specifically, by adopting a cool pose, Black men put on a mask that suggests competence, high self-esteem, control, and inner strength; however, this self-portrayal also hides self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil (Majors & Billson, 1992). As the purpose of coping is to help the person manage various situations, the cool pose helps the person adapt to environmental conditions and neutralizes stressful encounters (Majors & Billson, 1992). As a coping strategy, the cool pose can enhance self-esteem, increases one's chance of survival, serves as a guide for behavior, instill pride, provide meaning, and help navigate and deal effectively in various environments (Majors & Billson, 1992). However, the cool pose can also be a bad coping strategy for Black men in that it can make identifying feelings, experiencing those feelings, or the ability to express those feelings to others difficult, even when it is generally safe to do so (Majors & Billson, 1992).
The literature regarding Black masculinity is extensive. However, the research regarding
the use of the cool pose as a coping strategy is sparse. Further investigation is needed to
understand the coping mechanisms that cool pose displays for African American men. To date,
there have been no studies linking the idea of cool pose to help-seeking.

Taken together, there appears to be a socio-historical framework, through the
understanding of Africentric philosophies, which provides insight into the cultural dynamic of
coping. One of the central aspects of Africentric philosophies is maintaining harmony in the
relationship between the person and their surroundings. When encountered with stressful
situations, one can potentially go through a series of thoughts to determine what can or should be
done to alleviate a particular stressor. However, once a decision is made to act to effectively
handle the stressor at hand, the individual then goes through another series of evaluations about
what to do and where to go. This assessment can potentially lead a person to go looking for
various coping resources to use. One form of coping is seeking help from other people. Thus,
understanding the help-seeking process is essential when the demands exceed the resources that
a person has for themselves, and that calls for the assistance of others.

**The Help-Seeking Process**

The notion of help-seeking has its roots grounded in many disciplines, such as
anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and medicine (Arnault, 2009). Furthermore,
much of the research dedicated to understanding the help-seeking process has been on
characteristics (e.g., cognitive, developmental, and motivational) of the person seeking help and
contextual features of the person-situation interaction (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Help-seeking is
defined as “any communication about a problem or troublesome event which is directed toward
obtaining support, advice, or assistance in times of distress. Help-seeking includes both general
discussions about problems and specific appeals for aid. In addition, it encompasses requests for 
assistances from friends, relatives, and neighbors as well as professional helping agents” 
(Gourash, 1978; p. 414).

Furthermore, help-seeking is a proactive step to alleviate a problem or situation (Lee, 
1997). Help-seeking is seen as a purposeful act and is contingent upon the person becoming 
aware that there is a need for help (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Help-seeking can be viewed as 
conceptually different from seeking feedback or seeking information because help-seeking is 
geared towards fixing a specific problem (Lee, 1997). Help-seeking occurs when a person 
recognizes that they are unable to manage a difficult task or situation on their own. Thus, the 
person seeks assistance from another person or a group of people in order to effectively manage 
the task or situation at hand.

While there has been no singular theoretical conceptualization of the help-seeking 
process, social norm and self-esteem are two major approaches used to understanding help-
seeking (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). The social norm approach to the help-seeking process contends 
that various cultural values and social roles play a major part in the emphasis of dependence 
Specifically, some cultural norms place an importance on self-reliance and individual 
achievement that may impact attitudes developed toward seeking help (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). 
Thus, how an individual decides to embody certain cultural values is critical to determining how 
integrative stress and coping model with an emphasis on cultural context (Chun et al., 2006), this 
idea of social norms connects to the cultural values of individualism and collectivism. Being 
self-reliant and focusing on individual achievement would be considered under individualistic
viewpoints. Therefore, if a person identifies strongly with these sets of social norms, the likelihood of seeking help from someone else is small. However, if a person depends on the large group/community, then seeking help from others may be an option.

In the time of need, asking for someone’s help can be an uncomfortable experience that could make the person requesting assistance feel inadequate, embarrassed, and subject to rejection by those they are asking (Bohns & Flynn, 2010). Help-seeking, through the lens of self-esteem, is grounded in the idea that a person has deeply instilled personal thoughts, beliefs, and conceptualizations of themselves (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Therefore, a person’s self-esteem determines a person’s vulnerability to situations, which then may threaten the self at the point of admitting inadequacy to others and themselves (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Thus, when help is needed and requested, the person may have difficulty coping with the idea of having failed at something and as a result of that sense of failure, their self-esteem diminishes (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985).

In order to more fully understand the help-seeking process, it is important to identify characteristics and concerns of those who seek out various types of help and support (Gourash, 1978). Age and race have been identified as two key characteristics that distinguish between those who seek help and those who do not seek help (Gourash, 1978). What has been largely misunderstood are the factors that lead to a person’s choice to seek help and the choice about selecting a particular helper (Gourash, 1978). Connected to this idea is theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985), which suggests that people develop plans, have intentions, and act. Also, the theory of planned behavior can provide some more insight to those factors that lead people to make a decision to seek help. Insight might be gained from examining this movement from plan, to intention, to behaviors and allow for information about barriers that block people from seeking
help, when needed. Moreover, gaining a better understanding of different sources of help-seeking, such as the need for medical assistance, academic assistance, or psychological assistance and the process that individual’s choose to engage in for help is important for continuing to understand the overall help-seeking process which could lead to better strategies to promote help-seeking. The following subsections will explore four areas of help-seeking, which are health help-seeking, academic help-seeking, and psychological help-seeking. Also, help-seeking among college students will be highlighted. This subsection is important as it sheds light on how students view help-seeking.

As mentioned before, there are limited studies on the help-seeking attitudes of Black graduate students, thus a review of Black college students will be discussed. A review of these areas of help-seeking help to identify many different kinds of help-seeking options and the experiences that individuals have with seeking or not seeking help. Central to this study is seeking more information on help-seeking options that Black graduate students engage. These subsections provide a brief review of help-seeking sources, however, this study seeks to understand other sources of help that Black graduate students engage beyond the ones mentioned.

**Health Help-Seeking**

There are many complex reasons as to why individuals decide not to seek medical attention, do not follow up with medical treatment plans, or avoid medical settings in general (Dornelas, Fischer, & DiLorenzo, 2014). Being hesitant or avoidant of seeking professional medical attention can make the situation worse and can also be extremely life-threatening (Fischer, Dornelas, & DiLorenzo, 2013). People who are afraid of medical operations and finding out results from tests, suspicious of the medical industry, embarrassed by a medical
condition, or apprehensive about trusting health professionals will be hesitant or never willingly seek help from medical professionals (Fischer et al., 2013). In addition to personality and social factors, an individual’s symptom severity and attitudes may play a large part in influencing an individual’s decision to seek medical help (Fischer et al., 2013).

A behavioral model of seeking medical help and access to medical care was developed by Ronald Andersen (1995). This model first appeared in 1961 with the unit of analysis being the family as a critical factor in determining medical help-seeking (Andersen, 1995). However, the model has undergone several revisions to its most current form. The model is comprised of four broad domains (1) environment, (2) population characteristics, (3) health behavior, and (4) outcomes (Andersen, 1995). The environment consists of the health care system and the external environment. Population characteristics include predisposed attitudes and beliefs about the healthcare system and medical professionals, the resources that are available, and the need to seek help. Health behavior entails an individual’s health practices and the use of medical services. Finally, outcomes involve the individual’s satisfaction, evaluation of health status and perceived health status (Andersen, 1995).

Dornelas et al. (2014) conducted a study on the attitudes of community residents towards seeking medical help. The sample consisted of White (n = 250), Black (n = 73), and Latino (n = 41) community members in the northeast region of the United States. In addition, the sample comprised of nearly equally gender representation, with women accounting for 52.4 percent. The sample of community members completed measures that consisted of the Attitudes Towards Seeking Medical Care (Fischer et al., 2013) and a demographic questionnaire. The results of this study found that Black and Latino members of the community were more likely to have intentions to seek medical care and had a higher level of confidence in the health profession than
Whites. Also, once symptoms were identified, Black participants were most likely to seek medical care and have more positive intentions to get preventative care (Dornelas et al., 2014). The findings also revealed that there was no significant difference between race for attitude of being avoidant or fearful of the health care system. There was no reported difference for gender.

Yousaf, Grunfeld, and Hunter (2015) conducted a systematic review of the literature regarding factors that are associated with medical and psychological help-seeking delays for men. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; McLeroy, Northridge, Balcazar, Greenberg, & Landers, 2012) guidelines, Yousaf and colleagues (2015) found 41 studies that met criteria for their literature search. Between the 41 studies, the total number of participants was 21,787. The demographic characteristics from among the 41 studies included participants from various countries throughout the world, such as the United States, Japan, Malaysia, and Ghana. Also, while a wide range of ethnicities were included in these studies, a majority of the participants were White men. The methodology used among the studies were split between qualitative (19) and quantitative (22). A large portion of the studies focused on attitudes towards seeking help, while few examined the behavioral aspects of help-seeking. The common findings as a result of the review include four barriers to help-seeking for men, including (1) feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, distress, and fear, (2) need for emotional control and guarded vulnerability, (3) dismissing symptoms as minor and insignificant, and (4) poor communication and rapport with professionals (Yousaf et al., 2015).

Not being familiar with services, misunderstanding the medical world, and identifying in traditional masculine gender norms led to participants of the reviewed studies to endorse feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, distress, and fear (Yousaf et al., 2015). When it comes to needing emotional control or being guarded, many men seem to be apprehensive about sharing personal
information and being subjected to vulnerable moments. Devaluing symptoms appears to stem from a lack of knowledge about symptoms for certain health issues. Finally, a common theme found between the studies in regard to poor communication was that many men described the interpersonal interactions with health professionals as being rude, rushed, couched in scientific language, and insensitive to the needs of the individual (Yousaf et al., 2015).

**Academic Help-Seeking**

In terms of academic help-seeking, Nelson-Le Gall (1985) makes a distinction between two types of help-seeking, executive and instrumental. Executive help-seeking is when a student is in need of help, but has the intention to seek help in order for someone else to solve the problem for them. On the other hand, instrumental help-seeking refers to the process when help is needed, and the student is focused on understanding ways to solve the problem for themselves (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Understanding the distinction between instrumental and executive help seeking for academic purposes can provide information about the motivations or barriers that students may experience when in need of solving a problem related to school.

A study on academic help-seeking for college students was conducted by Karabenick (2003). This study looked at help-seeking threat, help-seeking intentions, goals in seeking help, preferred helping resources, motivations to course-related dynamics, and learning strategy uses. The researcher administered a 107-item questionnaire to 883 college student (51% female) in six large chemistry classes. No other demographic information was provided. The questionnaire included scales that assessed for motivation and affect, achievement goal orientation, learning strategies, and help-seeking behaviors. Specifically, help-seeking behaviors were operationalized as instrumental/adaptive, formal/informal, threat, avoidance, and executive. Instrumental/adaptive and executive help-seeking followed whether help was intended to solve
the problem or to gain understanding learning how to solve the problem on their own. Formal 
and informal help-seeking was categorized based on the source (e.g. teacher or classmate).
Finally, threat and avoidance were reactions based on the need to seek help.

The findings of this study revealed that college students were more likely to engage in 
executive help-seeking and avoid seeking help when they felt more threatened. Also, students 
reported that they would still approach or avoid their professors as they would their classmates 
for help regardless of how threatened or avoidant of seeking help they were. The study also 
found that students who were interested in seeking instrumental help were more likely to prefer 
that help from professors than from their peers. Findings also suggested that students who were 
interested in mastery of the learning materials sought instrumental-type help and preferred 
formal sources of help. In terms of help-seeking behaviors, the researchers ran a cluster analysis 
to group students based on their help-seeking indicator profiles. One group of students mostly 
identified as preferring formal sources (e.g., from teachers) of help and were strategic in their 
help-seeking process. Another group had a more instrumental preference for seeking help and 
sought help from informal sources, such as classmates, instead of their professors. A third group 
of students indicated that they had higher levels of threat, avoidance, and executive preference 
for help-seeking, while having low levels of instrumental and formal help-seeking behaviors. 
Finally, students in the last group had higher levels of threat, avoidance, and executive help- 
seeking goals, which made them more avoidant of seeking help.

A study by Kitsantas and Chow (2007) examined the different learning environments that 
college students could be engaged in and assessed for perceived threat, as well as help-seeking 
preference. The study included a sample of 472 undergraduate students, where 76.5 percent of 
the sample identified as White and 65.3 percent were females. The researcher specifically
examined the learning environment across four types: (a) a traditional class with no course webpage component, (b) courses that have a face-to-face interactions and course webpage component with additional course information and material, (c) online classes that included special communication technology, and (d) online classes that featured communication in real-time with peers and faculty, along with a virtual-reality classroom setting (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007).

The measures that were used to assess help-seeking behaviors included an academic self-efficacy scale, help-seeking preference survey, student’s perceptions of threat scale (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991), assessment of achievement related and help-seeking tendencies scale (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991), a demographic sheet, and course achievement through final grades (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). The results of the study indicated that when seeking help from professors, students preferred to contact them via electronic means, primarily through e-mail use.

Also, the findings suggest that college students prefer to seek help from their peers through electronic means. In addition, college students who were engaged in courses with some webpage component tended to seek more formal help from professors than those in traditional face-to-face course. Furthermore, college students who were enrolled in traditional class settings felt more threatened than those in non-traditional classes by seeking help. Finally, the amount of formal help-seeking and academic self-efficacy was positively related to academic achievement; however, the inverse was found for perceived threat of seeking help and help-seeking tendencies on academic achievement (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007).

**Psychological Help-Seeking**

One form of help-seeking that is well-documented is psychological help-seeking. Psychological help-seeking is a process in which the individual comes to the realization that one
needs professional help, has confidence in the ability of the professional to help, is open to share one’s distressing issues, and has a tolerance of the stigma associated with receiving professional psychological services (Fischer & Turner, 1970). One of the most widely used measures to assess attitudes towards psychological help seeking is Fischer and Turner’s (1970) Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS). This scale consists of 29 items across four domains to seeking help: (1) recognition of personal need for professional psychological help, (2) tolerance of the stigma associated with psychiatric help, (3) interpersonal openness regarding one’s problems, and (4) confidence in the mental health professional (Fischer & Turner, 1970).

African Americans do not typically seek out professional mental health services and are less likely to acknowledge the need for help. Specifically, African Americans who are male, married, and unemployed are less likely to seek help (Lindsey, Korr, Broitman, Bone, Green, & Leaf, 2006; Obasi & Leong, 2009). Also, both young and old African American males are less likely to seek assistance (Lindsey et al., 2006; Obasi & Leong, 2009). Also, if help is sought by African Americans, they are more likely to seek help from primary care physicians, use emergency services, and have mandated mental health consultations (So, Gilbert, & Romero, 2005). Many studies (e.g., Duncan, 2003; Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012; Wallace & Constantine, 2005; Watson & Hunter, 2015) have examined the psychological help-seeking process, specifically for African Americans. In addition, African American/Black college students have been a primary population that the help-seeking literature has investigated.

Black College Students and Help-Seeking Attitudes

A large body of literature regarding help-seeking behaviors comes from the undergraduate student populations. In particular, there is a body of research on help-seeking
attitudes of African American/Black undergraduate students (Duncan, 2003; Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; So et al., 2005). This subsection reviews these studies to provide information about the attitudes that African American/Black undergraduate have on seeking help on their college campuses.

Duncan (2003) examined the nature of psychological helping seeking attitudes in Black male college students. Specifically, Duncan (2003) explored the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES), age, cultural mistrust, African self-consciousness, and attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. The sample was comprised of 131 black male students (121 undergraduate students, 10 graduate students) from two pre-dominantly White institutions and two historically Black universities. Duncan (2003) used the ATSPPHS, the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI; Terrell & Terrell, 1981), and the African Self-Conscious Scale (ASCS; Baldwin & Bell, 1982) along with a demographic sheet. The results of this study indicated that Black male students who were older and Black male students who identified as coming from a lower SES background tended to have more favorable attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Duncan, 2003). Also, the results of the study showed there was a negative relationship between cultural mistrust and attitudes towards seeking psychological helps, which could mean that higher levels of cultural mistrust in this particular sample of Black male students could potentially indicate more negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Duncan, 2003). Finally, African self-consciousness was not predictive of Black male students’ attitudes towards seeking psychological services (Duncan, 2003).

In a study of African American undergraduate students, by So et al. (2005), the connection between year in school and psychological help-seeking attitudes was examined. So and colleagues (2005) sampled 134 African American college students from historically Black
colleges, where 84% of the participants were female. The researchers used the ATTSPHS to assess the various attitudes that individuals could hold and a demographic questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that college students’ confidence in mental health professionals increased as they moved further along in college (So et al., 2005). Also, the findings suggest that having confidence in mental profession was strongly related to recognizing there is a need for help (So et al., 2005). So et al. (2005) found that although this sample of African American college students indicated having higher confidence levels in mental health professionals, it did not increase tolerance to stigma, recognition for the need for help, or being open to receiving help as they progressed through college.

Gloria, Hird, and Navarro (2001) conducted a study on college students to assess their views of the college campus environment, the cultural fit between individual and environment, and help-seeking attitudes. Specifically, the researchers sought to investigate potential differences due to race and gender. The sample consisted of 716 undergraduate students (69% were female), where 54.8% identified as being White and 45.6% identified as being a racial or ethnic minority. Gloria et al. (2001) administered a survey packet including the University Environment Scale (UES; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996), the Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996), and the Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Modified (ATSPPHS-M; Atkinson & Gim, 1989). The results revealed that males and racial/ethnic minorities had less favorable help-seeking attitudes than Whites and females. Furthermore, the same results were found for cultural congruity. Also, the racial and ethnic minorities in this sample indicated that they had less positive perceptions of the university environment than did the White students (Gloria et al., 2001). This study also sought to understand the extent to which cultural context variables predicted help-seeking attitudes. The
findings suggest that cultural context variables (e.g., cultural congruity and experiences of the campus environment) did account for help-seeking attitudes for racial and ethnic minorities, Whites, and females. However, cultural context variables were more prominent for racial and ethnic minorities than Whites. Finally, the relationship between cultural congruity and help-seeking attitudes was stronger for women than men (Gloria et al., 2001).

**Summary of Help-Seeking Sources**

As it pertains to help-seeking, there are different types of help-seeking areas that a person may need and can choose from. Most of the current literature that focuses on the help-seeking process tends to focus on psychological needs. Further, there have been mixed findings in the general help-seeking literature about the nature of attitudes towards seeking help. One of the observations from the brief review of the studies above indicates that for African Americans, there may be more acceptance or positive attitudes in seeking help from medical professionals than from psychological professionals. Another observation is that there appears to be more literature with larger samples of men for the health help-seeking literature. Also, the sample sizes in the study reviewed above consisted of low numbers of Black or African American participants. Academic help-seeking literature has primarily focused on elementary school-aged children and college students; however, there is a little research on academic help-seeking among graduate students or Black graduate students, specifically. Overall, most of the studies examined help-seeking based on attitudes versus intentions. While it is important to understand the attitudes of those who seek professional or personal help, it is equally important to gain an understanding of the reasons that would hinder an individual to seek help. Further, by understanding the barriers to seeking help, it can begin to lead in the direction of looking at behaviors leading to seeking help instead of attitudes about seeking help.
Barriers to Seeking Help for African Americans

The process of seeking help is much more complex than many would think. Seeking help is not merely just asking for assistance and receiving it. Seeking help encompasses many decisions, such as who to seek help from, what kind of help is needed, how long the help will be needed for, where to go for help, and consequences of seeking help or not. Another central aspect for understanding help-seeking is recognizing the barriers that people face when it comes to seeking assistance from others. Barriers can be considered as obstacles that people face that prevent them from doing or achieving certain tasks. Barriers can include attitudes someone holds, which may stem from socio-historical experiences, or be in place due to policies.

Parallel to the literature regarding help-seeking being focused on psychological help-seeking, research on barriers to seeking help has primarily focused on barriers to seeking psychological services as well. While people who would benefit from psychological services seldom use it, racial and ethnic minorities are the least likely to get treatment for their needs (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006; Snowden & Yamada, 2005). Historically, it has been noted that African Americans, compared to their White counterparts, use professional mental health services less often, attend fewer counseling sessions, and prematurely terminate counseling services (Constantine, Chen, Ceesay, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2013).

There are several barriers that interfere with use of psychological services by African Americans. These barriers include cognitive schemas, attitudes, and preferences for certain counselors (Snowden & Yamada, 2005). Scholars have also identified the following as barriers: self-concealment/self-disclosure (e.g., Consedine, Sabag-Cohen, & Krivoshekova, 2007; Larson & Chastain, 1990; Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012), stigma (e.g., Corrigan, 2004; Lindsey, Joe, & Nebbit, 2010; Lucksted & Drapalski, 2015, Wallace & Constatine, 2005), cultural
mistrust (e.g., Bell & Tracy, 2006; Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Whaley, 2001), and access (e.g. Snowden & Yamada, 2005; Stefl & Prosperi, 1985). The following sections will provide further detail about each barrier as listed above. First, self-concealment and self-disclosure will explore how sharing of personal information can impact seeking help from others. Second, ways in which stigma impedes help-seeking will be examined. Third, cultural mistrust from a historical lens will be explained. Finally, issues with regard to accessing services with be highlighted.

**Self-concealment and Self-disclosure**

In terms of seeking psychological help, the idea of sharing personal information with another person can be anxiety-provoking. When it comes to engaging in psychological services, one aspect that is important to the therapeutics process is for the client to share personal and important information. However, for many people, this aspect may be thought of as a difficult task. Thus, the idea of self-concealment and self-disclosure may serve as an obstacle for people. Self-concealment is defined as the tendency to withhold personal information that may be sensitive and perceived as negative by those receiving it (Larson & Chastain, 1990). Similar to self-concealment, self-disclosure is viewed as being comfortable enough to make one’s self known through sharing personal histories, attitudes, thoughts, experiences, and feelings with another person or groups of people (Consedine et al., 2007). While these two terms are often times used interchangeably, they are unique in that one is the act of revealing (self-disclosure) and the other is the act of concealing (self-concealment; Larson & Chastain, 1990).

Generally speaking, African Americans may choose to not fully disclose certain personal information out of fear that they may misrepresent the integrity of their larger racial group (Ridley, 1984; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). In other words, in order to protect the views and representation of their larger racial group, African Americans may choose to withhold or only
share limited information. Also, specific to therapy, African Americans are less likely to disclose than White people (Ridley, 1984; Wallace & Constantine, 2005). According to Ridley (1984), African Americans’ decision to disclose personal information about their daily lives can be influenced by two forms of paranoia: (a) cultural paranoia and (b) functional paranoia.

Cultural paranoia is considered as a healthy, protective, psychological reaction to racism and discrimination by White people, and can result in the person deciding not to disclose due to fear of being hurt or misunderstood (Ridley, 1984). On the other hand, functional paranoia is seen as an unhealthy psychological condition, where a person has a general suspicion and mistrust of people which results in the decision to not disclose any information (Ridley, 1984). Thus, African Americans may be reluctant to disclose their thoughts and feelings in order to protect themselves from appearing a certain way, being hurt as a result of the information shared, and being misunderstood about their situations (Ridley, 1984). As a result, African Americans may not be as likely to use services, such as mental health services, when distressed. While there is a protective function for cultural paranoia and maladaptive function of functional paranoia, both are judged to carry a negative connotation because of the stigma associated with concept of paranoia.

**Stigma**

Another barrier that has been associated with mental health issues for decades, and has been found to be a significant factor in determining the use of psychological services, is stigma (Masuda et al., 2012; Wallace & Constantine, 2004). Stigma is defined as something carrying a negative connotation or being marked due to some characteristic or trait that is different, viewed as being less than, and determined based on contexts (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Two forms of stigma that are specifically geared towards mental health and mental health services are public
stigma and internalized stigma. Public stigma refers to the general public’s negative attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions held towards mental health and illness (Corrigan, 2004). Internalized stigma is the personal, negative conception of mental health that results in ambivalence, shame, devaluation, secrecy, and social withdrawal due to fear of being viewed in a negative manner (Luckstead & Drapalski, 2015). Compared to Whites, African Americans hold more stigma towards mental health concerns and services (Masuda et al., 2012; Wallace & Constantine, 2005).

A study by Matthews, Corrigan, Smith and Aranda (2006) used focus groups of African Americans (N=70; 74% women) to explore their attitudes towards psychological service use and seeking psychological help. The participants of this study included members of the community, members of civic organizations, mental health providers, church members, and clergy (Matthews et al., 2006). The primary questions the researchers were interested in understanding were African Americans’ views on culture and mental health, stigma towards mental illness, coping strategies to decrease stigma, ways to increase use of mental health services, and causes of mental illness. Specific to stigma, the results of the study suggest that this group of African Americans understand that there is stigma associated with having a mental illness within the African American community; this stigma brings about shame, embarrassment, and rejection (Matthews et al., 2006). Also, the findings revealed that when it comes to stigma of mental illness, there is social distancing that occurs in the African American community because of the fear of association with a person who has a mental illness. Finally, participants explained a fear of losing social status, as once an illness is disclosed people would be treated differently (Matthews et al., 2006).
Stigma can potentially bring about many fears in people about the way they will be treated and viewed by others if psychological help is needed. Stigma can be considered as one of the prominent barriers for seeking help, as stigma can effect a person at the individual and societal level. For African Americans, avoiding stigma is an important task and involves being able to handle situations on their own (Matthews et al., 2006).

**Cultural Mistrust**

Cultural mistrust, a term coined by Terrell and Terrell (1981), is defined as the level of distrust and/or suspicion that African Americans hold towards Whites through interpersonal dynamics, social situations, politics, education, and business contexts. Throughout history, African Americans have been exposed to numerous unethical and traumatizing medical and scientific experiments, and therefore have developed, as a collective, a sense of mistrust and suspicion of Whites (Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Tucker, 1994). One of the most well-known studies of clinical research that had a major impact on African Americans and may contribute to cultural mistrust was the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment.

The Tuskegee experiment, which began in 1932, was conducted in order to understand the progression of untreated syphilis. The participants of this study were poor, illiterate, African American men in Tuskegee, Alabama (Tucker, 1994). Some of the participants already had syphilis and many others were exposed to the disease as part of the research. The participants were compensated for their involvement by receiving free medical exams, food, and financial assistance for burials (Knight, Roosa, & Umana-Taylor, 2009). The clinical research team did not have informed consent of the participants, did not share vital information pertaining to the risks and benefits, and withheld treatment of the disease when treatment became available.
Many of the Black men died due to inadequate or lack of treatment because they were unaware of the severity of their conditions (Knight et al., 2009).

As a result of cultural mistrust, many African Americans do not frequent professional mental health services, and perhaps other services, due to that mistrust and suspicion of what and how something is going to be done to them (Cheatheam, Barksdale, & Rodgers, 2008; Duncan, 2003). Beyond concerns with self-concealment and disclosure, cultural mistrust, and stigma, lack of access to psychological services is also a major barrier when seeking help.

**Factors in Service Use**

Some factors that have been associated with help seeking attitudes are accessibility, affordability, availability, and acceptability (Stefl & Prosperi, 1985). Accessibility to psychological services entails an individual to have transportation to and from their appointments. Also, not having the proper knowledge about services offered and the availability about where services are located hinders the utilization of services (Snowden & Yamada, 2005; Stef & Prosperi, 1985). Affordability is a major barrier to using professional psychological services, as the cost of services may not be covered by insurance (Snowden & Yamada, 2005). The socioeconomic status and employment status of a person is a major barrier to seeking assistance from outside resources, as services may cost various fees (Cheatham et al., 2008). In addition, those who are working must weigh the cost of having to take off time from work to go to an appointment. In regard to acceptability, there is significant stigma associated with using psychological services, such as the fear of being looked at in a certain manner and fear of what family and friends may think of the individual (Snowden & Yamada, 2005; Stef & Prosperi, 1985).
The Current Study

A majority of the research on help-seeking behaviors and the use of psychological services on university campuses has focused on undergraduate students and their needs (e.g., Ayalon & Young, 2009; Barksdale & Molock, 2008; Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012, So, Gilbert, & Romero, 2005; Stansbury, Wimsatt, Simpson, Martin, Nelson, 2011). A population that has not been given much attention with regard to help-seeking attitudes and behaviors, along with academic experiences, is graduate students. Furthermore, the literature on African American/Black graduate students is extremely limited. The research that is available on African American/Black graduate students primarily focuses on their general experiences of the university or program climate, most often relating to issues of racism. However, there is a shortage of literature regarding coping strategies or help-seeking behaviors among African American/Black graduate students.

Research that has explored help-seeking attitudes and behaviors has mainly focused on the use of psychological service. Moreover, research identifying barriers to receiving or using services has been commonly linked with medical and psychological services. However, seeking a counselor for psychological help is just one domain of help-seeking. People can seek academic assistance from teachers or academic advisors, or seek help from clergy men and women. Having a greater awareness about the needs of African American/Blacks and understanding the ways in which African American/Blacks seek help, and who people seek help from can improve access to services and quality of services.

In order for university personnel and departments to effectively promote graduate school adjustment and successful completion of programs, awareness of graduate students’ experience is critical (Rocha-Singh, 1994). While the literature tends to focus on the broad scope of help-
seeking attitudes of college students, a more in depth analysis of the help-seeking process of graduate students, and particularly African American/Black graduate students, is of equal value and note-worthy. Previous studies on graduate students suggest that stress in graduate programs is inevitable and that there are various coping strategies that one could use. However, what is still unclear, particularly for African American/Black graduate students, is who they go to seek help from and the decision-making process that propels them to seek help.

The purpose of this study is to further explore the experiences of African American/Black graduate students, across disciplines, at the master’s and doctoral level. Specifically, this study seeks to understand African American/Black graduate students’ perceived levels of stress, their cognitive appraisal of the stress, and their help-seeking behaviors. This study will add to the existing literature on Black graduate student experiences. Furthermore, this study may provide some suggestions for ways to improve graduate education experiences for African Americans/Black students.

The research questions for the present study include:

Research Question 1: What stressors do Black graduate students encounter?
Research Question 2: What coping strategies do Black graduate students use?
Research Question 3: What sources of help do Black graduate students use?
Research Question 4: How do Black graduate students appraise stressful situations and make the decision to seek help?
Research Question 5: What is the nature of the relationship between stress and coping among Black graduate students?
Research Question 6: Does stress and cognitive appraisal predict help-seeking intentions among Black graduate students?
METHOD

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of stress among Black graduate students. In addition, this study seeks to examine the ways in which Black graduate students cope and seek help during stressful events. Specifically, the study intends to shed more light on understanding the cognitive evaluations that Black graduate students make when dealing with stress or stressful situations and seeking help. This chapter provides details pertaining to the methodology and procedures to conduct this study. Information in the chapter will include the characteristics of the sample, measures that are used, the recruitment and data collection procedures, the design of the study, and statistical analyses used to address the research questions.

Participants

A total of 189 participants attempted the online survey. The data was screened for completeness, in which 20 surveys were identified and removed due to being insufficient for data inclusion and analysis. Surveys were considered insufficient due to all responses in the survey being left blank or if participants only completed certain sections of the survey, such as the background questionnaire only. Thus, a final sample resulted in 169 participants. Participants self-identified as African-American (56.2%, n = 95), Black (30.2%, n = 51), African (3.0%, n = 5), Afro-Latina (1.8%, n = 3), Afro-Caribbean (2.4%, n = 4), and Bi-Racial (6.5%, n = 11). The majority of the sample identified as women (72.8%, n = 123), with men (n = 45) accounting for 26.6 percent. Also, participants primarily self-identified as heterosexual (84.6%, n = 146). The age range for participants varied from 22 to 62 years old ($M = 32.11, SD = .678$). The sample included 49.7% of participants (n = 84) enrolled in master’s degree programs (e.g., Master of
Arts, Master of Science, Master of Social Work, Master of Education, Master of Business Administration, Master of Music) and 50.3% of participants (n = 85) enrolled in doctoral degree programs (e.g., Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Education). Additionally, 74.0% of participants (n = 125) were enrolled in their programs on a full-time basis, while 26% (n = 44) were enrolled on a part-time basis.

The sample ranged in their year within their program, with approximately a quarter of participants being in their first-year of their program (24.9%, n = 42), a quarter being second-year students (25.4%, n = 43), 21.9% being third-year student (n=37), and 11.4% being fourth-year students (n = 20). Approximately 16.1% accounted for participants (n = 27) being in their 5th year and beyond. Majority of the sample (73.4%, n = 124) reported that their academic advisor was not of the same race or ethnicity as them. Also, approximately half of the sample (48.5%, n = 82) reported that they had thoughts of leaving their academic programs.

A chi-squared test of independence was performed to examine the association between type of degree (master’s or doctoral) and thoughts of leaving their academic program. The results indicated a statistically significant association, \( \chi^2 (1) = 9.02, p < .05 \). For doctoral students in the sample, 60% reported that they have thought about leaving their program, whereas 40% reported not having thoughts of leaving program. Pertaining to master’s students, 36.9% reported having thought of leaving their program, whereas 63.1% reported not thinking about leaving program.

Finally, slightly above half (56.2%, n = 95) of the sample reported being employed outside of their school responsibilities (e.g. assistantships). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between type of degree (master’s or doctoral) and employment outside of school. The results indicated a statistically significant association, \( \chi^2 (1) = 7.42, p < .05 \). For master’s students in the sample, 66.7% reported having employment outside
of school, whereas 33.3% reported not having employment outside of school. For doctoral students in the sample, 45.9% reported having employment outside of school compared to 54.1% who reported not having employment outside of school.

**Measures**

The measures for this study include a Background Sheet, the Graduate Stress Inventory-Revised (GSI-R; Rocha-Singh, 1994), the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi, & Rickwood, 2005), supplemental Help-Seeking items, the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI; Utsey, Bolden, & Adams, 2000), and Cognitive Appraisal items. Each of these sources of data is described below. Discussion of psychometric properties is included for the GSI-R, ACSI, and GHSQ. Description of the nature of the supplemental Help-Seeking items and the Cognitive Appraisal items used for the purpose of this study is also provided. Together, the GSI-R, GHSQ, and supplemental Help-Seeking items provide data concerning the nature of daily and accumulated stressful events that Black graduate students experience and their typical help-seeking intentions. The ACSI and the Cognitive Appraisal items provide data concerning the coping strategies and appraisal evaluations for specific stressful situations.

**The Background Sheet**

The Background Sheet was designed for specific use in this study. The background sheet asks participants to self-report on personal, family, academic, and employment information. Personal information includes race/ethnicity, age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, relationship status, and number of children. Family information includes mother’s and father’s level of education. Academic information includes length of degree program, degree type sought, program discipline, year in program, enrollment status, race/ethnicity of faculty advisor,
activities involved in with school, student organization involvement, thoughts about leaving current program, undergraduate institution type, and graduate institution type. Employment information includes employment outside of school, work hours per week, and level of income.

**Graduate Stress Inventory-Revised (GSI-R; Rocha-Singh, 1994)**

The Graduate Stress Inventory-Revised (GSI-R; Rocha-Singh, 1994) is a 21-item, self-report, measure that assesses the degree to which situations that occur in the lives of graduate students are perceived as stressful. The measure consists of three subscales: Environmental Stress, Academic Stress, and Family/Monetary Stress. The Environmental Stress scale, consisting of eight items, assesses how a student perceives the climate at their institution. An example of an item for this scale is, “Trying to meet peers of your race/ethnicity on campus”. The Academic Stress scale, consisting of seven items, assesses how a student perceives the load of their academic responsibilities. An example of an item is, “Handling academic workload”. The Family/Monetary Stress scale, consisting of five items, assesses how a student perceives the stress of their family and financial responsibilities. An example of an item is, “Paying monthly expenses.” The measure is scored on a seven-point Likert type scale, where 1 is not at all stressful and 7 is extremely stressful. There was no direct indication of scoring and interpretation procedures in the initial development article (Rocha-Singh, 1994); however, the GSI-R has been used in other studies (e.g. Dowdy, 2001; Scott, 2006) that reported scoring and interpretation procedures. Scores on the GSI-R can be totaled to yield an overall graduate stress score and can also be scored to yield three distinct subscale scores (Dowdy, 2001; Scott, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the three subscale scores of the GSI-R will be used in order to examine the relationship among the different types of stress that Black graduate students perceive and other variables. In addition, the total score generates the overall perception of
having graduate student stress and will be used to help understand group differences for demographic variables.

The initial item development for the original Graduate Stress Inventory (GSI) was based on a series of research findings regarding graduate students and their experiences on campus, as well as theories related to stress and coping. Some studies (e.g., Duncan, 1976; Hartnett, 1976) focused on the social experiences and academic climate of graduate students (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Other research (e.g., Hall & Sandler, 1982; Trujillo, 1986) used for item development examined the gender and racial/ethnic differences of graduate students (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Studies on socio-psychological environmental factors (e.g., McMurtey, 1988; Mendoza, 1981) influenced Rocha-Singh (1994) to identify four domains: (1) professional/academic, (2) environmental, (3) familial, and (4) monetary obligations for the GSI items. Finally, Lazarus’ (1966, 1977) theory on the process of cognitive appraisals was used to base the items of the GSI in a context that examines external events and assesses internal stress that could have variations for different groups of people. After item selections, the GSI had a total of 25 items. The initial development and validation of the GSI was conducted across three studies, which led to the development of the GSI-R.

The first study consisted of 450 master’s and doctoral-level students from a mid-size, research-driven, university on the west coast of the United States (Rocha-Singh, 1994). The sample was comprised of 308 White Americans, 26 African Americans, 40 Chicano/a, 15 other Latino/as (not specified), 9 American Indians, 18 Japanese American, 16 Chinese Americans, and 18 international students from Asia (India, China, Japan, and Korea; Rocha-Singh, 1994). No other socio-demographic information was reported. Rocha-Singh (1994) categorized the sample as targeted and non-targeted participants. Specifically, non-targeted participants included
White Americans and Asian Americans; while targeted participants included African American, American Indians, Chicanos, Filipino, and Puerto-Ricans (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Targeted participant were members of racial/ethnic groups that are typically underrepresented in graduate education and have lower retention rates, whereas non-targeted participants are those of racial/ethnic groups who are mostly represented and persist (Brown, 1987; Rocha-Singh, 1990).

Participants completed the initial Graduate Student Inventory (GSI), which consisted of 25 items. The directions for the GSI asked participants to rate the amount of stress they perceived in relation to their encounters in graduate school on a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 (not at all stressful) to 7 (extremely stressful).

In the first study, Rocha-Singh (1994) identified three factors using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The three factors identified were Environmental Stress, Academic Stress, and Family/Monetary Stress based on the research as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The original list of items consisted of 25 items; however, after a common factor analysis was conducted the measure was reduced to 21 items due to certain items having high correlations with other items in a given domain (Rocha-Singh, 1994). An EFA was conducted on the 21-items GSI-Revised (GSI-R). Specifically, Rocha-Singh (1994) used a three-factor oblique maximum likelihood extraction solution. Rocha-Singh (1994) used a criterion for item factor loading of .35 or higher to retain items. Based on the results, 19 items were retained and the planned domains of familial stress and monetary stress were combined (Rocha-Singh, 1994). This yielded a three-factor model with Environmental Stress as Factor 1, Familial and Monetary Stress as Factor 2, and Academic Stress as Factor 3 (Rocha-Singh, 1994). The internal consistencies of the first study had moderate to high Cronbach’s alpha for Environmental Stress (.85), Academic Stress (.77), and Family/Monetary Stress (.78).
The second study was conducted to assess the concurrent validity of the GSI-R (21-items) against the Trait Anxiety Inventory-Form Y2 (Speilberger et al., 1983). The sample for this study included 469 (178 females and 291 males) doctoral students in their first year from two large research universities on the west coast (Rocha-Singh, 1994). The racial and ethnic characteristics of the sample included 257 White Americans, 27 Asian Americans, 15 African Americans, 23 Latino/as (not specified), 17 Chicano/as, 4 American Indian, 2 Puerto Rican, and 2 Filipino (Rocha-Singh, 1994). In this study, major areas of study were also reported by race. Of the White participants, 49% were in the hard science, 29% were in the social sciences, and 27% majored in the arts and humanities (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Of the non-targeted ethnic groups (Asian Americans and other Latino/as), 56% were in the hard sciences, 24% were majoring in the social sciences, and 16% were studying in the arts and humanities (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Finally, among the targeted participants (African Americans, American Indians, Chicano/as, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans), 15% were studying in the hard sciences, 55% were majoring in the social sciences, and 30% were in the arts and humanities (Rocha-Singh, 1994). In addition, Rocha-Singh (1994) assessed for socioeconomic status (SES) based on father’s level of formal education. Specifically, Rocha-Singh (1994) categorized SES on three levels: elementary/some high school (1), high school diploma/some college/community college/business (2), and post-secondary education/masters/doctorate (3). Of the sample, 66% had a Level 3 SES, 22% had a Level 2 SES, and 12% had a Level 1 SES (Rocha-Singh, 1994).

In the second study, participants were asked to complete the GSI-R and the Trait Anxiety Inventory Form-Y2. The Trait Anxiety Inventory Form-Y2 (Speilberger, 1983) is a 20 item measure that assesses a person’s level of trait anxiety, using a four-point Likert type scale. Rocha-Singh (1994) analyzed the subscale correlations between the GSI-R and the Trait Anxiety
Inventory for concurrent validity. Correlations yielded .45 between Environmental Stress and Trait Anxiety, .45 between Academic Stress and Trait Anxiety, and .20 between Family/Monetary Stress and Trait Anxiety (Rocha-Singh, 1994). After correcting for unreliability, the correlations between the GSI-R and the Trait Anxiety Inventory-Form Y2 are low enough to detect that the two measures are measuring different constructs, stress and trait anxiety.

The factor structure for the GSI-R (with 21 items) for this sample was analyzed using principal factors and maximum likelihood extraction using orthogonal and oblique rotations (Rocha-Singh, 1994). Items with a factor loading of .35 or more were retained. Based on the results, 20 items were retained. A factor analysis yielded three factors, as found in the pilot study (Rocha-Singh, 1994). The reliability estimates found in this study were low to moderately high with coefficient alpha’s being .30 (Environmental Stress), .74 (Academic Stress), and .68 (Family/Monetary Stress).

The final study was conducted to assess the retest reliabilities of the GSI-R scores. The sample for this study consisted of 63 master’s students of a counseling psychology and marriage, family, and child counseling program at a university on the west coast. The sample consisted of 6 African Americans, 6 Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, 8 Chicano/as, 38 White Americans, and 1 American Indian (Rocha-Singh, 1994). No other socio-demographic information was reported.

The participants for the third study completed the GSI-R (21-items) at two times, one-week apart. Moderately high test-retest reliability was demonstrated for Environmental Stress (.80), Academic Stress (.85), and Family/Monetary Stress (.85; Rocha-Singh, 1994). No information on discriminate or predictive validity was reported for this study. Based on the three
studies presented, it is suggested that the GSI-R yields three factors with moderate to high internal consistency and test-retest reliability.

In a dissertation study, Scott (2006) examined the perceived stress experienced by diverse female graduate students attending predominantly White institutions. The sample consisted of 494 women, with ages ranging from 21 to 63 years old (Scott, 2006). All participants were enrolled in graduate programs, with 52.05% being in Masters programs, 3.07% being in specialist programs, 42.62% being in doctorate programs, and 1.02% being in professional degree programs (Scott, 2006). Of the participants, 73.4% identified racially as White, 23.8% identified racially as Black, and 2.9% identified racially as mixed or other (Scott, 2006).Ethnically, 59% identified as European American, 21.59% as African American, 2.44% as Hispanic, 13.44% as Multi-Ethnic, .41% as Asian, 2.24% as Caribbean, and .41% as Haitian (Scott, 2006). In terms of marital status, 50.2% of the participants were never married, single and 80.9% did not have any children (Scott, 2006). For those in the sample that did report having children, 42.55% had only one child and 36.17% had two children (Scott, 2006).

Participants of this study were given a survey packet, administered on-line. The survey packet included demographic questionnaire, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), the GSI-R, Pearlin’s Mastery Scale (PM; 1983); and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Endler & Parker, 1999).

A principal component factor analysis using a varimax and promax rotation was used to identify meaningful subscales and factor loadings of .30 or higher were needed for item retention (Scott, 2006). Based on the sample for Scott (2006), the GSI-R did not factor as anticipated. Scott (2006) suggests that the observed differences in factor structure may be due to the sample being only women, where the GSI-R was initially validated using samples of men and women.
(Scott, 2006). Scott (2006) makes the observation that men and women could have varying perceptions about stress, thus seeing a difference on how items loaded to factors. Furthermore, a promax rotation identified that the three subscales (Academic Stress, Environmental Stress, and Family/Monetary Stress) were weakly correlated ($r = .245$ to $r = .414$), thus Scott (2006) did not use a total score and used subscale scores to measure distinct stress experiences. Moreover, the reliability of the scores was moderate. Specifically, Factor 1 (Academic Stress) yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .81, Factor 2 (Environmental Stress) resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .78, and Factor 3 (Family/Monetary Stress) yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .74 (Scott, 2006).

Correlations for the three subscales of the GSI-R (Academic, Environmental, and Family/Monetary) were calculated with the Negative Stress subscale of the PSS. Academic Stress correlated at .40 with Negative Stress. Environmental Stress correlated at .36 with Negative Stress. Family and Monetary Stress correlated at .32 with Negative Stress (Scott, 2006). The moderate statistically significant correlations between the three subscales of the GSI-R and the Negative Stress subscale of the PSS indicated that the GSI-R subscales are sources of negative stress (Scott, 2006).

**Summary**

The GSI-R was chosen as a measure of stress because its development was grounded in literature specifically focused on graduate education, difficulties that students encounter, and experiences of racial/ethnic students. In addition, the measure was also developed with considerations towards cognitive appraisal, as conceptualized by Moos (1984), which is one of the theoretical bases for this study. Finally, while this measure has not been used extensively, it has been used with diverse samples of graduate students and has yielded adequately reliable and
valid scores. Cronbach’s alphas for the present study were moderate: Environmental Stress was .79, Academic Stress was .81, and Family/Monetary Stress was .70.

**General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson et al., 2005)**

The General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) is a 10-item scale that measures help-seeking intentions. Specifically, the GHSQ assesses help-seeking intentions by measuring the degree of someone’s intentions to seek help for a problem from a specific source (Wilson et al., 2005). The GHSQ assess for two problem-types: personal-emotional and suicidal thoughts. The directions for the GHSQ state, “If you were having a personal or emotional problem, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people” and “If you were having suicidal thoughts, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people.” (Wilson et al., 2005). Some examples of the sources of help include family, intimate partner, doctor, mental health professional, and religious leader. The GHSQ uses a seven-point Likert-type response scale, (1 = extremely unlikely; 7 = extremely likely) to assess how likely an individual is to seek help from a particular source. The scores from the GHSQ can range from 10 to 70, with higher scores indicating the person has higher intentions of seeking help (Wilson et al., 2005).

To understand the psychometric properties of the GHSQ, Wilson and colleagues (2005) conducted a study with 218 ($N = 106$ females) high school students, ranging from ages 12 to 19. The participants were recruited from grades seven to 12 in an Australian public school district (Wilson et al., 2005). No other socio-demographic information was reported. The participants were asked to complete a survey packet consisting of the GHSQ, the Actual Help-Seeking Questionnaire (AHSQ; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994), the brief version of the Barriers to Adolescents Seeking Help (BASH; Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick, & Morrissey, 1997), and four items measuring prior counseling experiences from previous studies (Carlton & Deane, 2000; Deane et
al., 1999; Deane et al., 2001). The survey was administered to the participants twice. The lapse in time between the first administration and the second administration was three weeks (Wilson et al., 2005).

The results of the study revealed that the items on the GHSQ could be scored in two ways (Wilson et al., 2005). The first way the GHSQ can be scored is as single scale for both problem-types (personal-emotional and suicidal). Cronbach’s alpha indicated a score of .85 and a three-week test-retest reliability score of .92 for this scoring procedure (Wilson et al., 2005). The second of way scoring yields two subscale scores, one for personal-emotional problem types and one for suicidal thoughts. Scoring the scale for just suicidal problems yield a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 and a three-week test-retest reliability of .88 (Wilson et al., 2005). Scoring the scale for just personal-emotional problems yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .70 and a three-week test-retest reliability of .86 (Wilson et al., 2005).

Wilson and colleagues (2005) found significant associations between help-seeking intentions and actually going to seek help from corresponding sources during the three-week follow-up, which indicates predictive and construct validity of the GHSQ. In addition, convergent validity was supported for the GHSQ with positive relationships between prior mental health counseling experiences and intentions to seek counseling (Wilson et al., 2005). Also, negative correlations were found between the participants reported barriers to seeking mental health help and their intentions to seek mental health counseling (Wilson et al., 2005).

Summary

According to Wilson et al. (2005), the GHSQ can be modified to fit a particular problem that matches the intended population and/or research question, thus making the scale more flexible and adaptable than other help-seeking measures. Based on the moderate to high
reliability of the scores and high test-retest reliability of the scores, the GHSQ appears to be a sound measure. The GHSQ was chosen to be included in the present study in order to learn more about the sources of help that Black graduate students may seek out. In particular, the GHSQ was developed based upon Ajzen’s (1985) theory of planned behavior, which underscores that intentions have a strong relationship with actual behaviors. For this study, the GSHQ is used to understand individual patterns of specific help sources, as well as using the total score for general help-seeking questionnaire. The GHSQ question pertaining to suicidality will not be used as this aspect is not relevant to this purpose of this study. For the purpose of this study, the reliability estimate for the total scale score on this sample resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .56. Ideally, scale scores above .70 are considered adequate. However, a reason for the low reliability estimate may be due to the inconsistency or wide range in responses from this particular sample.

**Supplemental Help-Seeking Items**

Three additional help-seeking items (two open-ended question and one forced-choice) focused on help-seeking were developed by the student investigator specifically for the purpose of this study. The first open-ended question seeks to gather information about the participants’ thought process of seeking help. The second open-ended question seeks to gather information about the participants’ thoughts of consequences to seeking help from others. The third, forced-choice, item ask participants’ frequency of seeking help from others. Questions were added at the end of the GHSQ, these additional items are not an addition to the GHSQ. Rather these are independent items that fit under the general heading of help-seeking and will be used to gather more exploratory data.
The Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI; Utsey et al., 2000)

The Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI) is a 30-item self-report measure that is grounded in an African-centered framework and measures coping strategies used by African Americans during stressful situations (Utsey et al., 2000). The ACSI consists of four subscales: Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing (CED; 11 items), Spiritual-Centered Coping (SC; 8 items), Collective Coping (CC; 8 items), and Ritual-Centered Coping (RC; 3 items). CED subscale measures the adaptive reaction to environmental situations and stress evolving from racial oppression (Utsey, Brown, & Bolden, 2004). An example item of the CED subscale is “Tried to convince myself that it wasn’t that bad.” The SC subscale measures a person’s resilience that comes from a sense of establishing harmony with the universe (Utsey et al., 2004). An example of a SC coping item is “Prayed that things would work themselves out.” The CC subscales measures a person’s comfort from seeking support from another person or group (Utsey et al., 2004). An example of a CC coping item is “Shared my feelings with a friend or family member.” Finally, the RC subscale measures the performing of rituals to maintain a spiritual balance (Utsey et al., 2004). An example of a RC coping item is “Lit a candle for strength and guidance in dealing with a problem.” The ACSI asks respondents to briefly describe a stressful circumstance that happened within the past week or two. Then, the respondents are asked to rate what coping strategies they use in the stressful situation described. Coping strategies are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (did not use) to 3 (used a great deal).

The initial development of the ACSI consisted of 74-items that were generated from interviews with African Americans from different backgrounds (i.e., gender, educational level, and socioeconomic status), review of the literature, and personal accounts and ideas from the primary researcher (Utsey et al., 2000). To assess for content validity of the items, Utsey et al.
(2000) conducted focus groups with African Americans and Afro-Caribbean adults who completed the 74-item prototype and then discussed the experience. Due to lack of clarity and relevance, several items were either rewritten, added, or removed, and a new prototype of 57-items was developed (Utsey et al., 2000). Next, Utsey et al. (2000) had four expert judges, with research knowledge on Black Psychology and African Americans, complete the 57-item prototype of the ACSI and rate items for clarity and appropriate fit with specified domains. The expert judges rated each item for clarity on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (confusing) to 4 (very clear; Utsey et al., 2000). Items were rated with a yes or no for domain fit. Items that received a rating of less than 3 were either re-written or removed and items that did not fit the intended domain were also re-written (Utsey et al., 2000). The results yielded another 57-item prototype (Utsey et al., 2000).

Finally, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 72 ($n = 52$ women) African Americans, ages 17 to 66, recruited from a small community college and a private Catholic university in the northeast part of the United States (Utsey et al., 2000). The purpose of the study was to understand the logistics of the ACSI, such as administration procedures, completion time, readability and clarity of items, and clarity of the directions (Utsey et al., 2000). Also, this pilot study facilitated item analysis for the ACSI (Utsey et al., 2000). The participants completed the 57-item prototype ACSI. As a result, 15 items were removed due to low item total correlations, lack of response variation, and extremely high or low means (Utsey et al., 2000). The corrected item total correlations for the ACSI ranged from .00 to .54, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .90 for the total score (Utsey et al., 2000). Thus, the final result yielded a 42-item version of the ACSI (Utsey et al., 2000). To determine the initial factor structure and validation of the ACSI, two studies were conducted.
The purpose of Study 1 was to determine the factor structure of the ACSI. The sample consisted of 180 African American adults comprised of college students and community members from the northeast region of the United States (Utsey et al., 2000). The sample was 57.8% women and 41.7% men, with an age range from 16 to 66. The average educational level of the sample was 13.75 years and average income was $28,043. Participants were asked to complete two measures, the 42-item ACSI prototype and the Ways of Coping Questionnaire-Short Form (WCQ; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

For Study 1, Utsey et al. (2000) ran an exploratory factory analysis (EFA) to determine the factor structure of the ACSI. The results indicated a four-factor model including Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing (Factor 1), Spiritual-Centered Coping (Factor 2), Collective Coping (Factor 3), and Ritual-Centered Coping (Factor 4). In addition to the EFA, subscale inter-correlations revealed low correlations among the subscales, indicating the ACSI assesses related, yet distinct constructs of coping among African Americans (Utsey et al., 2000). Fourteen prototype-items that did not load to any of the factors/subscales were removed. However, two of those items were added back after Utsey et al., (2000) determined the items represented important indicators of coping for African Americans even though the items failed to meet inclusion criteria of .42 factor loadings or higher. Thus, the final version of the ACSI includes 30 items (Utsey et al., 2000).

Internal consistencies values were also calculated on the ACSI in Study 1. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the subscales were .80 for Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, .79 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .71 for Collective Coping, and .75 for Ritual-Centered Coping. Subscale inter-correlations for the ACSI indicated Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing correlated .22 with Spiritual-Centered Coping, .28 with Collective Coping, and .14 with Ritual-Centered
Coping. Spiritual-Centered Coping correlated .35 with Collective Coping and .25 with Ritual-Centered Coping. Finally, Collective Coping correlated .22 with Ritual-Centered Coping.

The first study that Utsey et al. (2000) conducted also assessed for concurrent validity using the short-form of the WCQ. The results indicated the Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing subscale of the ASCI was correlated with three out of the five subscales of the WCQ (Detachment at .57, Seeking Social Support at .37, and Focusing on the Positive at .62; Utsey et al., 2000). The ACSI’s Spiritual-Centered Coping subscale correlated with three of the five WCQ subscales (Problem-Focused Coping at .34, Seeking Social Support at .38, and Focusing on the Positive at .61). The ACSI’s Collective Coping subscale was correlated with three of five WCQ subscales (Problem-Focused Coping at .51, Seeking Social Support at .50, and Focusing on the Positive at .59). The Ritual-Center Coping subscale of the ACSI did not correlate with any of the subscales from the WCQ (Utsey et al., 2000).

The correlations between the subscales of the ACSI and the WCQ make sense. In particular, it was not surprising the Ritual-Centered Coping subscale did not correlate with any subscale of the WCQ (Utsey et al., 2000). This particular finding is logical due to the philosophical frameworks that the ACSI (African worldview) and the WCQ (Euro-centric worldview) were developed out of and differences that occur based on ritualistic practices (Utsey et al., 2000). The correlation between Collective Coping of the ACSI and Seeking Social Support of the WCQ makes sense because both involve the person being around others and getting others involved. Also, the correlation between the ACSI’s Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing subscale and the WCQ’s Detachment subscale makes sense due to the survival mechanism as a part of the African worldview to cope with adverse oppressive experiences (Utsey et al., 2000). Overall, the correlations between the ACSI and WCQ suggested that African Americans employ similar
mainstream coping strategies, yet can have distinct features based on cultural philosophies, such as the African worldview.

The purpose of Study 2 was to evaluate the ACSI using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The ACSI, consisting of the finalized 30-items, was administered to a sample of 220 African Americans (72% female). The sample was derived from three colleges (an HBCU, a private Catholic university, and a public university) and community members in the northeast region of the United States (Utsey et al., 2000). The sample ranged from 17 to 66 years old and had an average educational level of 13.75 years (Utsey et al., 2000). Of the sample, 68% were single, 20% were married, 7% were divorced or separated, and 2% were widowed (Utsey et al., 2000). Finally, the sample had an average income of $19,000. The administration and procedures followed those of Study 1, where participants were asked to complete the ACSI (Utsey et al., 2000).

Internal consistencies were calculated on the ACSI in Study 2. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the subscales were .79 for Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, .82 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .78 for Collective Coping, and .76 for Ritual-Centered Coping. Subscale inter-correlations for the ASCI indicated Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing correlated .40 with Spiritual-Centered Coping, .34 with Collective Coping, and .30 with Ritual-Centered Coping. Spiritual-Centered Coping correlated .50 with Collective Coping and .38 with Ritual-Centered Coping. Finally, Collective Coping correlated .39 with Ritual-Centered Coping.

The CFA of Study 2 data revealed that a four-factor oblique solution had the best fit (GFI = .77, AGFI = .73, lowest $\chi^2 = 841.27$, lowest $\chi^2 / df = 2.11$, and RMSR = .090; Utsey et al., 2000). It should be noted, however, the goodness-of-fit for this model is lower than the recommended level of .90 or higher (Shevlin & Miles, 1998). Also, Utsey et al. (2000)
conducted an aggregated-item CFA. Cronbach’s alphas were .78 for Cognitive/Emotional Debriefing, .80 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .81 Collective Coping, and .65 for Ritual-Centered Coping (Utsey et al., 2000). In addition, the GFI and AGFI for orthogonal and oblique models ranged from .81 to .89 and .76 to .85, respectively (Utsey et al., 2000). No information about discriminant or predictive validity was reported.

Summary

The reliability and validity of the ACSI suggest that the scores are not as strong as one would like; however, the reliability and validity of the scores for the ACSI are adequate. This especially important to consider given that it is one of the few coping measures that specifically can be considered as culturally relevant to African Americans/Blacks. As this present study has a specific focus on Black graduate students, the ACSI seems to be an appropriate tool to use to understand various coping styles. For this study, the scores for each of four subscales will be used for data analysis, as designed by Utsey et al. (2000). Internal consistencies for this study resulted in a low to moderate scores of reliability for CED (.81), SC (.88), CC (.74), RC (.58).

Cognitive Appraisal Items

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) contend that measuring cognitive appraisal poses some difficulty due to individual differences. As mentioned in Chapter II, under the section “Cognitive Appraisal and Coping”, two forms of appraisals (primary and secondary) occur before coping strategies are employed. Primary appraisal assesses the nature of the stress (e.g., harm, threat, or challenge). Secondary appraisal focuses on the next course of action including (1) what can be done, (2) how can it be done, (3) considering potential consequences of various actions, and (4) deciding to carry out a particular action.
Folkman and Lazarus (1986) attempted to measure cognitive appraisal of stress in depressed individuals using a short scale created specifically for that study. The scale focused only on secondary appraisal and consisted of four (4) items, ranked on a five-point Likert scale (range was not reported). The items assessed the extent to which a stressful situation was an event (1) “that you could change or dome something about”, (2) “you had to accept”, (3) “in which you needed to know more information”, and (4) “in which you hold yourself back from doing what you want to do” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986; p.108-109). No other psychometric properties of that scale were reported.

Since Folkman and Lazarus (1986) introduced these items, there have been a few other measures (e.g., Meaning of Illness Questionnaire, Stress Appraisal Measures, Appraisal of Illness Scale) developed that have attempted to assess cognitive appraisals of stress, particularly in medical patients (Carpenter, 2016). However, the majority of these measures lack sound psychometric properties (Carpenter, 2016). Due to the complexity in measuring cognitive appraisals, like Folkman and Lazarus (1986), a small number of studies (e.g., Devonport & Lane, 2006; Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2012; Thornton, 1992) examining cognitive appraisal have developed short questionnaires (e.g., 1 to 5 items) specifically for their respective studies based on Folkman and Lazarus’ (1986) scale of secondary appraisal. Of particular interest for the purpose of this work is the study by Hoggard et al. (2012), with a focus on an African American sample.

Hoggard and colleagues (2012) examined the difference in coping when African American college students encountered racially versus nonracially stressful events. Specifically, the researchers were interested if African American college students appraised racially stressful situations differently than nonracially stressful events. Participants (n=35; 74% female) were
self-identified African American college students that were a subset of the sample for a larger longitudinal study. The longitudinal study was conducted over a two-year period and asked participants (n=299) to complete a 20-day daily diary to record experiences, as well as complete annual surveys asking about experiences, attitudes, and well-being. The participants were gathered from three universities in the United States (two predominately White institutions and one historically Black college/university). Hoggard et al. (2012) were most interested in participants who reported having stressful events and their appraisal and coping of that event in their daily logs.

Several measures were used which included demographic items from the annual survey used in the longitudinal study, the Daily Life Experience scale (DLE; Harrell, 1994), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), and a daily log of stressful events. Stressful events were coded by researchers to determine if the event was a racially stressful event or a nonracially stressful event. The dependent variables of this study included coping as measured by the Racial Coping Checklist (Harrell, 1994) and appraisal items that were specifically developed by Hoggard et al. (2012). The appraisal measure consisted of three items rated on a 4-point Likert type scale. The anchors of the Likert type scale varied for each item according to what was asked to be rated. The first item assessed “how taxing the event was to their resources and ability to cope”. The second items assessed “how stressful the event was”. The third item assessed “how successful they felt they were at coping with the situation”.

Hoggard et al. (2012) hypothesized that the sample of African American college students would appraise racially stressful situations differently than nonracially stressful events. Specifically, they hypothesized that the sample would appraise racially stressful events as more taxing, more stressful, and less successfully coped with than nonracially stressful events. The
results of the study indicated that there was no difference with the appraisal of these stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012). However, there were differences found with how the sample coped with racially stressful events versus nonracially stressful events. The researchers found that participants engaged in more avoidance and ruminating coping and less planful problem-solving for racially stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012). Also, more confrontive coping was used when participants cited racially stressful events than nonracially stressful events (Hoggard et al., 2012).

For the purpose of this study, secondary cognitive appraisal will be assessed using a combination of questions adapted from Hoggard et al. (2012) and Folkman and Lazarus (1986). Specifically, these seven questions are designed to describe the evaluation steps that would characterize secondary appraisal for stressful situations. Given the exploratory nature of these items, each item will be assessed individually and combined to create a scale to provide information about secondary cognitive appraisal.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Participant Recruitment**

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB; Project #17-02-38) at Western Michigan University (See Appendix A). A purposive sampling method was used to gain a variety of student experiences, with the addition of a snowballing sampling method. Participants were initially set to be recruited from four target institutions, which included two pre-dominantly White universities and two historically Black college and universities. The selection of institutions was derived using the Carnegie Classification (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.), Historically Black College and University rankings (U.S. News and World Report, 2016), and informal professional networks. The target institutions were chosen in order to capture a variety of graduate students across
degree types (e.g., master’s, doctoral, and first-time professional) and disciplines. However, institutional review board policies for access and communication concerns prevented recruitment of potential students at the two historically Black colleges and universities. Thus, participants were only recruited from two of the four target institutions, specifically the predominantly White universities.

The participants for this study were recruited through the use of e-mails with an electronic flyer attached. The student investigator contacted and obtained permission from the Office of Institutional Research at the first target institution, and the Office of Student Affairs, along with the Dean of Students, at the second target institution to distribute the email announcement for the survey to students through email listservs. Target email listservs were generated by the two target institutions offices based on the inclusion criteria for the participants. Once the email listservs were created, the student investigator either provided the recruitment and survey information to the institution to send on her behalf or manually uploaded materials to send to the listserv email address that was provided (See Appendix B-E).

Participants were provided with the contact information (e.g., office phone numbers and university emails) for the principal investigator, as well as for the student investigator on all recruitment notices and emails. Participants were encouraged to contact the principal and/or student investigator if they wanted to learn more about the study and/or if they had any questions or concerns. The student investigator consulted with the principle investigator to field any calls or emails that came from participants. The primary method of responding to participants was via e-mail in order to be efficient and to provide as much detail and information regarding the nature of the study as possible and appropriate. Participants were invited to share information about this survey with others who may be attending other universities and meet inclusion criteria. The
invitation is extended in the email, on the flyer, and at the end of the debriefing page of the on-line survey.

**Data Collection Method**

**On-line Survey Method**

The survey was distributed using the on-line survey website, PsychData®. PsychData® is a full-service survey developing website that is specifically geared toward psychological and social science research. PsychData® also ensures that their platform meets IRB requirements to ensure protection, confidentiality, privacy, and security of the data that is generated through this portal.

All relevant study information and materials was combined into a single-survey. Once a person expressed interest in participating in the study, the participant clicked on the link that was provided in the e-mail or on the electronic flyer. After the link opened, the participant saw the welcome page that consisted of a brief introduction to the study and the informed consent that provided details about the study, confidentiality and privacy, risks and benefits, compensation, and how to ask questions about the study. Once the participant understood and agreed to the terms outlined on the informed consent page, they clicked “Continue” to indicate their consent and move on to the next portion of the survey (see Appendix F).

Next, the participant moved to the portion of the survey which consisted of the background sheet, the GSI-R, the GHSQ, the supplemental Help-Seeking items, the ACSI, the Cognitive Appraisal items, and a debriefing page (see Appendix G-M). The professional contact information for the student and principal investigators, as well as Western Michigan University’s HSIRB, was provided for participants who wanted to ask questions or express concerns during
and/or after the study. Based on the pilot test for time completion expectancy, it is expected that participants completed the survey in approximately 20 minutes.

An on-line survey method was chosen for this study to support reaching the sample goal and for the convenience to reach participants at other universities. In addition, on-line surveys can be accessible at the participants’ location of choice for further convenience.

**Compensation for Participation**

At the end of the survey, participants had the option to enter into a drawing. If a participant chose to enter in the drawing, the participant followed the link on the last page of the survey. The link redirected participants to a Google Document where they were required to submit their e-mail address. There was an opportunity to win one (1) of fifteen (15) Amazon gift cards in the amount of $25.00. Eight (8) winners were drawn after the 100th survey was completed. The remaining seven (7) winners were drawn at the completion of the data collection process. E-mail addresses were drawn at random. The e-mail addresses were linked to the surveys in order to ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participant. The winners were sent the gift card via the e-mail provided.

**Data Management**

Following the completion of data collection, the student investigator exported the data from PsychData® to the statistical software package, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), for data cleaning and analysis. All data files from SPSS are stored on an encrypted flash drive and encrypted files on the student investigator’s computer. At the conclusion of this study, the data will be stored as property of the principle investigator and/or department for a minimum of seven years, meeting the requirement of the IRB and American Psychological Association guidelines.
Design of the Study

This study sought to explore the characteristics of stress, appraisals of stress, coping, and help-seeking intentions among Black graduate students. There is limited research on the experiences of Black graduate students. Also, there is a dearth of research examining the cognitive appraisal of stress among Black graduate students. Thus, the design of this study is mixed-method, using majority quantitative and a small qualitative design to answer the research questions.

This study employed a quantitative-descriptive design. In research endeavors, a quantitative-descriptive design serves a vital function in describing the characteristics of a particular phenomenon and helps to describe relationships among different variables (Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang, 2016). This particular study employed a survey research approach, one of three major approaches to quantitative descriptive studies. The survey research approach attempts to capture the frequencies of particular variables within a certain population and serves as a great strategy to assess student needs and concerns (Heppner et al., 2016). There are characteristics and experiences of Black graduate students that are still needed to be explored; and there are relationships among variables that may prove useful in supporting graduate student retention and completion. Thus, multiple regressions and canonical correlations were the primary statistically analyses used.

This study also employed a small qualitative design. To assess for an aspect of cognitive appraisal, the student investigator used two open-ended questions. A general thematic analysis is used to capture themes that related to secondary appraisal as theorized by Moos (1984) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984).
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore stress and coping experiences for Black graduate students. Specifically, this research sought to examine the cognitive appraisal, or cognitive evaluation, of Black graduate students’ help-seeking intentions related to stress and coping. Several research questions were designed to explore these areas: (1) What stressors do Black graduate students encounter?, (2) What coping strategies do Black graduate students use?, (3) What sources of help do Black graduate students use?, (4) How do Black graduate students appraise stressful situations and make the decision to seek help?, (5) What is the nature of the relationship between stress and coping among Black graduate students?, (6) Does stress and cognitive appraisal predict help-seeking intentions among Black graduate students? The results of this study are presented in three sections: preliminary analysis, descriptive analyses, and inferential analyses to address the research questions.

Preliminary Analysis

Prior to performing descriptive statistics, and descriptive and inferential analyses, the data were screened for outliers and inclusionary standards based on survey completion. A total of 189 participants submitted the online survey via PsychData. The data was then screened for surveys that were insufficient for data analysis. As a result of data screening, 20 surveys were excluded from further analysis due to inadequate survey completion. Surveys were considered to be inadequate due to only certain portions of the survey being complete, such as only completing the demographic portion or completing only one measure while leaving the majority of the survey without any response input. The final sample for this study consisted of 169 participants. The data were then screened again for missing data, or no response indicated, by reviewing each
single item entry of each participant and coded with either a -9 or -99 to indicate missing item entry within SPSS.

**Descriptive Analyses**

**Areas of Stress for Black Graduate Students**

Graduate students’ perceived experiences of stress were measured with the GSI-R. The measure consists of three subscales, Academic Stress (ACAD), Environmental Stress (ENV), and Family/Financial Stress (FFS). Each subscale was scored on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented items as “not at all stressful” and 7 represented items that were perceived to be “extremely stressful.” The mean score for ACAD for this sample was 4.15 (SD = 1.32), which indicated that the sample perceived academic factors as moderately stressful. For ENV, the average score was 3.17 (SD = 1.30), which indicated that the sample considered environmental factors to be stressful. Finally, the sample revealed a mean score for FFS of 3.90 (SD = 1.26), which indicated that financial and family factors were viewed as moderately stressful. The GSI-R total scale score produced an average of 3.74 (SD = 1.08). Thus, the sample’s overall score of perceived graduate school as moderately stressful.

A series of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to examine group differences for three demographic variables as independent variables, and three types of graduate student stress as the dependent variables. The independent variables included gender, degree type, and thoughts of leaving graduate program. The dependent variables were Academic Stress, Environmental Stress, and Financial/Family Stress.

The first one-way MANOVA was conducted to determine a group difference between gender and types of graduate student stress. The results indicated a non-significant difference for gender and types of graduate student stress, Wilk’s $\lambda = .981$, $F(3,164) = 1.076$, $p = .361$. The
partial $\eta^2 = .019$. For specific graduate student stress variables the differences between means for women and men were not significant, though women reported somewhat higher scores for ACAD ($M=4.27; SD = 1.24$), ENV ($M = 3.25; SD = 1.26$), and FFS ($M= 3.99; SD = 1.24$) than men ($ACAD M= 3.87; SD = 1.45$; ENV $M = 2.98; SD = 1.39$; FFS $M = 3.73; SD = 1.27$).

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also employed to examine whether a group difference exists for gender for overall perceived level of graduate stress. The results yield a non-significant difference between men ($M = 3.53; SD = 1.18$) and women ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.01$), $F(1,167) = 2.86, p = .09$. Thus, there was no difference between women and men for either specific types of graduate stress, or for overall graduate student stress.

The second one-way MANOVA was conducted to determine a group difference between degree type and types of graduate student stress. The Box’s M, which tests that the equality of covariance matrices across groups, was statistically significant, thus Pillai’s Trace test statistic is used to examine multivariate statistical significance. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between degree type and types of graduate student stress, Pillai’s Trace = .066, $F(3,165) = 3.872, p < .05$. The partial $\eta^2 = .066$. Three follow-up one-way ANOVAs were employed to further examine the group difference between master’s and doctoral students on the types of graduate student stress. Pertaining to ACAD, the results indicated a non-significant difference for Master students ($M = 4.29; SD = 1.38$) and Doctoral students ($M = 4.01; SD = 1.25$), $F(1, 167) = 1.78, p = .184$. For ENV, results indicated a non-significant difference for Master students ($M = 3.16; SD = 1.33$) and Doctoral students ($M = 3.18; SD = 1.28$), $F(1,167) = .018 , p=.895$. However, for FFS, the results suggested a statistically significant difference for Master ($M = 4.18; SD = 1.22$) and Doctoral students ($M = 3.63; SD = 1.26$), $F(1,167) = 8.06, p <$
The results indicate that master’s students report more financial and family stress than doctoral students.

A one-way ANOVA was also employed to examine whether a group difference exists for type of degree sought and overall perceived level of graduate student stress. The results yielded a non-significant difference between Masters students ($M = 3.87; SD = 1.11$) and Doctoral students ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.03$), $F(1,167) = 2.49, p = .117$. Thus, while there is no association between degree type and overall perceived level of graduate student stress, master’s students report higher levels of family and financial stress than doctoral students.

The third one-way MANOVA was performed to examine the difference between those who thought about leaving their graduate programs and those who did not for types of graduate student stress. The Box’s M, which tests equality of covariance matrices across groups, was statistically significant, thus Pillai’s Trace test statistic is used to examine multivariate statistical significance. The results revealed a statistically significant difference, Pillai’s Trace = .167, $F(3,165) = 10.992, p < .05$. The partial $\eta^2 = .167$. In addition, three follow-up one-way ANOVAs were employed to further determine group differences between those who thought about leaving their graduate program and the specific type of stress perceived in graduate school. For ACAD, the results indicated a statistically significant group difference between those who thought about leaving their graduate program ($M = 4.54; SD = 1.14$) and those who did not ($M = 3.78; SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 167) = 14.96, p < .05$. For ENV, the results indicated a statistically significant group difference between those who thought about leaving their graduate program ($M = 3.69; SD = 1.31$) and those who did not ($M = 2.68; SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 167) = 43.70, p < .05$. Finally, for FFS, the results showed a statistically significant group difference between those who thought about leaving their graduate program ($M = 4.13; SD = 1.20$) and those who did not
$M = 3.69; SD = 1.30)$, $F(1, 167) = 7.80, p < .05$. The results gathered from the three one-way ANOVAs indicate that the decision to leave the graduate program is associated with perceived graduate school stress, both overall and for each of the specific types of stress measured on the GSI-R.

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to examine group differences between those who thought about leaving their graduate program and overall level of perceived graduate school stress. The results yielded a statistically significant difference between those who endorsed thoughts about leaving their graduate program ($M = 4.12; SD = 1.03$) and those who did not think about leaving their graduate program ($M = 3.38; SD = 1.00$), $F(1, 167) = 22.05, p < .05$. The MANOVA results for specific types of stress, and the ANOVA results for overall stress indicate that the level of perceived stress may have an impact on the decision to leave a graduate program. In each case, those who thought about leaving their graduate program reported higher stress than those who did not think about leaving.

**Types of Help-Seeking Sources for Black Graduate Students**

Help-seeking intentions were measured with the GHSQ. Respondents provide a summary of the sources of help they may seek when needed. The measure is scored on a 7-point Likert scale ($1 = $ extremely unlikely; $7 = $ extremely likely). In terms of the overall intentions to seek help, the results indicated that sample would be somewhat likely to seek help from others ($M = 3.45; SD = .07$). Examining the specific help-seeking sources, the results showed that the sample would be likely to seek help from “Partner/Significant Other” ($M = 4.62; SD = 2.35$), “Friend” ($M = 4.92; SD = 1.88$), “Parent” ($M = 4.16; SD = 2.22$), and “Professor/Advisor” ($M = 3.87; SD = 1.91$). Also, this sample of Black graduate students would be somewhat likely to seek help from “Other Relatives” ($M = 3.48; SD = 2.04$) and “Mental Health Professional” ($M = 3.46$;
Finally, this sample would be unlikely to seek help from “Pastor/Priest/Religious Leader” ($M = 2.53; SD = 1.97$) and “Medical Doctor” ($M = 2.89; SD = 1.94$). Overall, the sample was unlikely to seek help from “no one” ($M = 2.77; SD = 1.94$) or “Someone else not listed” ($M = 1.76; SD = 1.56$). Taken together, the results revealed that the sources this sample would be likely to seek help from are those who are friends, partners, parents, and professors or advisors.

Three separate one-way ANOVAs were employed to examine whether a group difference exists for gender, degree type sought, or thoughts of leaving program and overall intentions to seek help. Pertaining to gender, the results yield a non-significant difference between men ($M = 3.35; SD = .94$) and women ($M = 3.49, SD = .88$), $F(1,166) = .802, p = .372$. For degree type sought, the results showed a non-significant difference between Master’s students ($M = 3.36; SD = .84$) and Doctoral students ($M = 3.54; SD = .93$), $F(1,167) = 1.824, p = .179$. Finally, for thoughts of leaving graduate program, the results revealed a non-significant difference between those who did think about leaving program ($M = 3.53; SD = .88$) and those who did not think about leaving program ($M = 3.37; SD = .90$), $F(1,167) = 1.261, p = .263$. The results, suggests that the demographic variables listed above do not have an effect on overall intentions to seek help.

Participants were also asked to rate how often they seek help from others when needed. This question was rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Often) to 4 (Not at All). Results revealed that 45.6% ($n = 77$) of the sample indicated that they “sometimes” ask for help, followed by 31.4% ($n = 53$) reporting that they “seldom” ask for help, 20.7% ($n = 35$) reported that they “often” ask for help, and 2.4% ($n = 4$) indicated “not at all.” for asking for help.
Coping Strategies Used by Black Graduate Students

Coping strategies were assessed with the ACSI, a measure that intends to examine the type of coping strategies that are derived from Africultural principles. It consists of four subscales, Collective Coping (CC), Spiritual Coping (SC), Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing (CED), and Ritual Coping (RC). Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (did not use) to 3 (used a great deal). The average score for the sample for CC was 2.23 ($SD = .60$), for SC was 2.17 ($SD = .83$), for CED was 2.12 ($SD = .60$), and for RC was 1.22 ($SD = .47$). The results indicated that this sample of Black graduate students tended to utilize Collective Coping, Spiritual Coping, and Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing “a lot” according to the Likert scale rating. The “least used”, according to the Likert scale rating of 1, coping strategy used for this sample was Ritual Coping.

Two one-way MANOVAs were conducted to examine group differences for two demographic variables as independent variables, and four types of Africultural coping mechanisms as the dependent variables. The independent variables included gender and thoughts of leaving graduate program. The dependent variables were Collective Coping, Spiritual-Centered Coping, Ritual-Centered Coping, and Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing. The first one-way MANOVA was employed to determine if a difference existed for gender and types of Africultural coping mechanisms. The Box’s M, which tests equality of covariance matrices across groups, was statistically significant, thus Pillai’s Trace test statistic is used to examine multivariate statistical significance. The results indicated a non-statistically significant difference, Pillai’s Trace = .031, $F(4,163) = 1.288$, $p = .277$. The partial $\eta^2 = .031$. While the difference in means across gender for specific types of Africultural coping was not statistically
significant, women reported slightly higher scores for CC ($M = 2.20; SD = .61$), SC ($M = 2.22; SD = .84$), RC ($M = 1.26; SD = .53$), and CED ($M = 2.14; SD = .61$) than men for CC ($M = 2.12; SD = .58$), SC ($M = 2.03; SD = .79$), RC ($M = 1.11; SD = .28$), and CED ($M = 2.09; SD = .61$).

The second one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine a difference for thoughts of leaving of graduate program and types of Africultural coping mechanisms. The results yielded a non-statistically significant difference, Wilk’s $\lambda = .969$, $F(4,163) = 1.319$, $p = .265$. The partial $\eta^2 = .031$. Thus, there was no association between thoughts of leaving their graduate program and types of Africultural coping mechanisms. For specific types of Africultural coping, the differences between means for those who thought about leaving their program and those who did not think about leaving were not significant, though those who thought about leaving reported slightly higher scores for CC ($M = 2.28; SD = .55$), SC ($M = 2.23, SD = .83$), RC ($M = 1.27; SD = .51$), and CED ($M = 2.24; SD = .59$) than those who did not think about leaving their program for CC ($M = 2.20; SD = .64$), SC ($M = 2.12; SD = .84$), RC ($M = 1.18; SD = .44$), and CED ($M = 2.03; SD = .62$).

**Appraisal of Stress and the Decision to Seek Help**

Two open-ended questions were used to examine participants’ thought process toward seeking help in stressful situations and the consequences that could occur as a result of seeking help. Specifically, the first question asked participants to describe their thought process for seeking help from others when stressful situations occur. The second question asked participants to describe consequences that they thought about when seeking help from others in stressful situations. A general thematic analysis was used to generate common ideas and thought processes related to participants’ ways of evaluating stressful situations and their intentions to seek help from others. First, all responses were reviewed by the student investigator for
completion. Next, each response was grouped with other similar responses based on language and context. Then, the grouped responses were reviewed to identify general themes.

For the question focusing on seeking help from others, several primary themes were generated. The themes illustrated participants’ thought process toward seeking help when faced with stressful situations. The first theme was labeled as “Mutual Understanding of the Problem”. One participant reported, “I think about who would most understand what I am going through.” Another participant wrote, “I think about who else would understand what I am currently experiencing or who has had a similar experience...” This theme represented that participants were thinking about someone who may be able to relate to or has experienced the situation they are needing help resolving. The second theme was categorized as “Talking with family and friends first”. One participants reported, “I call my parents and brother first to get their input first then I call my friends to get their opinion on the situation.” Another participant stated, “I usually go to my parents first, then try to solve the issue myself. If that doesn’t work, I ask my Professor and/or peers (if it is an academic issue) and then go to close friends”. This theme appears to represent that participants thought to consult with people who were close to them first and then take additional steps. The third theme was identified as “Handling on their own.” One participant revealed, “I consider myself an extremely independent person. This extends to all areas of my life and means that I am usually inclined to evaluate and address stressful situations on my own.” Another participant indicated, “I tend to first try to handle things myself because I feel like I'm supposed to be able to do so. When it becomes too much, then I will seek help from others.” This theme generally represents that idea expressed that some participants hold value in handling stressful situation on their own or feel that there is an expectation to address stressful situations on their own.
The fourth theme was identified as “Trusts in others”. An example of this from a participant was, “I turn to the people who know me best. The person has to be trustworthy…” Another participant stated, “I will consult people I trust within the school, work, or personal life”. This theme may convey that some participants in this sample needed to consider if the potential helper was trustworthy to share the stressful situation. The fifth theme generated was labeled as “Being a burden.” One example from a participant is, “I don't often because I don't want to be a burden to others who are also struggling...” Another example is, “When seeking help my thought process is contemplating if I am bothering other with my problems. It is hard enough for me to seek help in the first place. Because I am the one who always has it together. I just don't want to be a burden to anyone...” The idea expressed through this theme suggests that some participants thought about whether their need to seek help would inconvenience others. The sixth theme was characterized as “Determining the severity or importance of the stressful situation.” One participant reported, “I consider how bad or stressful the situation I’m in before I make a decision. For example, if it is a deadline, if its academic I talk to my wife or professor. If it is personal, I talk to God first.” Another participant stated, “I first determine if this is something worth talking about. After considering that, I will choose the proper person. Mostly my friends or parents.” This theme implies that some participants first would think about if the stressful situations warrants getting others involved. The seventh theme was categorized as “Relying on Faith”. One participant reported, “I usually pray if I'm stressful. That's how I cope. Sometimes I talk to my friends.” Another participant stated, “Prayer is my first instinct, reading the bible and seeking guidance from God is the next step I take, then I call on family and friends for advice and to be a listening ear.” This theme reflects some participants’ thoughts to first identify with faith or spiritual practice for seeking help and then potentially seeking others.
The second open-ended question asked participants to think about consequences they consider when thinking about seeking help. This question was a follow-up to the first open-ended question, thus some participants shared similar ideas related to help-seeking in both questions. Three general themes emerged which included (1) Fear of judgment, (2) Being viewed as weak or incapable, and (3) Lack of trust or confidentiality in the potential helper once the concern was disclosed. Of the first theme, one participant reported “Judgment from faculty and staff. Inappropriate sharing of personal information.” Another example from a participant was, “Are they going to judge me? Can I expect confidentiality?” For the second theme, one participant stated, “I think about seeming weak and unable to cope. I worry that someone may give me advice or support that doesn’t work for me.” This outcome indicated that some people in this sample of Black graduate students seemed to be concerned that they would be perceived by others in a negative manner for seeking help. Finally, a participant example that illustrates the third theme is, “I think about whether they are going to tell other people and their loyalty to me and what they may try to use against me.” The response that fell under this category demonstrated that there is a concern about the sought out helper sharing personal information.

Cognitive appraisal of stress was also examined through seven independent items that were used in previous literature (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986; Hoggard et al., 2012) related to stress and cognitive appraisal. Participants responded to these items based on a specific recent stressful event. Each item was scored on a 6-point Likert scale with various anchoring categories. The first item measures how taxing a stressful situation was on the participant’s resources and ability to cope. Based on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = Not Taxing at All to 5 = Very Taxing), the average score for the sample was 4.50 (SD = 1.41), indicating that they considered the stressful event to be very taxing. The second item measures how successful a participant felt they were at
coping with a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = Not Successful to 5 = Very Successful), the mean score for sample was 3.98 ($SD = 1.32$), which implies that participants felt successful at coping with the stressful situation. The third item measures to what extent a participant could change or do something about a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point Likert (0 = Not Changeable to 5 = Completely Changeable), the sample scored an average of 3.63 ($SD = 1.60$), which suggests that participants thought the stressful situation was changeable.

The fourth item measures whether the participant thought they had to accept a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = No Acceptance to 5 = Full Acceptance), the sample yielded an average score of 4.76 ($SD = 1.35$), which indicated that they thought they had to fully accept the stressful situation. The fifth item measures whether the participant needed more information before they could act on a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = No Information Needed to 5 = Lots of Information Needed), the sample yielded an average score of 3.51 ($SD = 1.68$), which implies that the participants needed information regarding their stressful situation. The sixth item measures the extent a participant felt they had to hold themselves back from doing what they wanted to do about a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point-Likert scale (0 = No Holding Back to 5 = Holding Back), the mean score for the sample was 3.50; ($SD = 1.80$), which suggests that participants felt that they slightly needed to hold themselves back. Finally, the seventh item measures how much a participant felt that they had control over a stressful situation. Based on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = No Control to 5 = Total Control), the average score for the sample was 3.47 ($SD = 1.61$), which implies that participants felt that they had some control of the situation.

The Cognitive Appraisal Scale, developed for this study, consists of 3 items that were extracted from a group of 7 independent items measuring cognitive appraisal. The three items
combined to create the Cognitive Appraisal Scale focused on how taxing a stressful situation was, having control over the stressful situation, and if action could be taken with the stressful situation. These items were selected based on their conceptual relatedness to help-seeking. Taken together, the mean scale score for the three items was 3.89 ($SD = 1.01$).

Descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the GSI-R, GHSQ, ACSI, and Appraisal scores are reported in Table 2. Subscales scores were examined for the GSI-R and the ACSI. Total score and single item scores were examined for the GHSQ. Single item scores and overall score for the Appraisal measure were examined.

Reliability estimates of the scores for this sample were included in the description of each measure in Chapter III.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Estimates Between Scores on GSI-R, GHSQ, ACSI and Appraisal Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>GSI-R</th>
<th>ACAD</th>
<th>ENV</th>
<th>FFS</th>
<th>GHSQ</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>RC</th>
<th>CED</th>
<th>Appraisal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GSI-R</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAD</td>
<td>.85**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV</td>
<td>.82**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHSQ</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CC</td>
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<td>.16*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CED</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>3.89</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
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<td>.74</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $N = 169$. GSI-R = Graduate Stress Inventory-Revised; ACAD = Academic Stress; ENV = Environmental Stress; FFS = Family/Financial Stress; GHSQ = General Help-Seeking Questionnaire; CC = Collective Coping; SC = Spiritual Coping; CED = Cognitive and Emotional Debriefing; RC = Ritual Coping; Appraisal = Cognitive Appraisal Scale. Coefficients bolded for significance at *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. 

108
Inferential Analyses

The Relationship Between Stress and Coping

A canonical correlation analysis was performed on the set of three GSI-R subscale scores and the set of four ACSI subscale scores to examine the relationship between stress and coping. The use of the canonical correlation allows for a more in-depth look at the latent, or hidden, variables pertaining to sets of variables beyond the observed variables. The first set of variables, the criterion variables, included Academic Stress (ACAD), Environmental Stress (ENV), and Financial/Family Stress (FFS). The second set of variables, the predictor variables, were Africulturally-grounded coping strategies, including Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing (CED), Spiritual Coping (SC), Ritual Coping (RC), and Collective Coping (CC).

The canonical correlation produced three functions with squared canonical correlations ($R^2_c$) of .10, .05, and .00 for each function, respectively. Taken together, the full model including all three functions indicated statistical significance (Wilk’s $\lambda = .846, F(12, 428.90) = 2.32, p < .05$). The effect size, which is derived from 1-Wilk’s $\lambda$, was .154. This small effect size indicated that for the full model, 15% of the variance was shared between the GSI-R variable set and the ACSI variable set. Based on a dimension reduction analysis, which tests the hierarchical order of the three functions, the full model (Function 1) was statistically significant as noted above. Function 2 to 3 and Function 3 to 3 were not statistically significant, Wilk’s $\lambda = .942, F(6, 326.00) = 1.66, p = .130$, and Wilk’s $\lambda = .994, F(2, 164.00) = .517, p = .599$, respectively. Thus, based on the dimension reduction analysis and the squared canonical correlation, only one function, Function 1, was determined to be interpretable.

Further examining the criterion variables for Function 1, all three stress variables contributed to the full model. The results indicated that the primary stress variable that
contributed to the synthetic criterion variable is Environmental Stress (ENV). The squared structure coefficient ($r_s^2$) indicated that 92.93% of the variance in ENV was shared with Function 1. The secondary contributors to the synthetic criterion variable were Family/Financial Stress (FFS) and Academic Stress (ACAD). The squared structure coefficients ($r_s^2$) indicated that 48.30% of the variance in FFS and 25.90% of the variance in ACAD was shared with Function 1, respectively. Looking at the structure coefficients ($r_s$) for the variables, the strength and direction of the relationship can be determined. For ACAD, an $r_s$ of -.509 indicated a moderate relationship. ENV and FFS indicated a strong relationship, with an $r_s$ of -.964 and -.695, respectively. The results also revealed that all the stress variables were positively related due to all variables having the same sign. Overall, the results reveal that Academic Stress, Family/Financial Stress, and Environmental Stress all contribute to the synthetic criterion variable, but Environmental Stress is the primary contributor.

Pertaining to the predictor variables, three of the four coping variables contributed to the synthetic predictor variable. The results indicated that Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing (CED), Ritual Coping (RC), and Collective Coping (CC) made contributions to the full model. Spiritual coping (SC) did not make a noteworthy contribution as the structure coefficient ($r_s$) did not make the .45 or higher cut-off. The coping variable that is the primary contributor to the synthetic predictor variable is CED, followed by RC and CC as secondary contributors. The contribution of the specific coping variable was determined by the squared structure coefficient ($r_s^2$), which indicates the proportion of the variance shared with Function 1 for each variable. The results revealed that 83.72% of the variance in CED was shared variance with Function 1, followed by 44.49% of RC, and 32.83% of CC. Looking at the structure coefficients ($r_s$) for the variables, the strength and direction of the relationship can be determined. The variables CED and RC
indicated strong relationships with $r_s$ of -.915 and -.667, respectively. The variable CC indicated a moderate relationship with an $r_s$ of -.573. The results also revealed that all the three coping variables (CED, RC, and CC) were positively related due to all variables having the same sign.

The results of the canonical correlation analysis further describe the relationship between the synthetic variates for Stress and Coping. The canonical correlation ($R_c$) of .318, indicates a moderate positive relationship between the synthetic variates for stress and coping. As noted above, the results indicate that the synthetic variables for stress and coping share 10% of the variance ($R_c^2 = .10$). Based on the standardized canonical correlation coefficients, Environmental Stress (-.872), Family/Financial Stress (-.336), Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing (-.727), and Ritual Coping (-.403) made the strongest contributions to the canonical correlation between the two synthetic variates for stress and coping. Although, Academic Stress and Collective Coping made strong contributions to the synthetic variable for stress and coping, respectively, their contribution to the canonical correlation between the two synthetic variances was smaller due to multicollinearity with other variables. Based on the pattern of structure coefficients, canonical correlations, and the overall canonical correlation, higher levels of graduate student stress (Academic, Environmental, and Family/Financial) is associated with higher use of Africultural coping strategies, particularly Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, Collective Coping, and Ritual Coping. A summary of the standardized canonical coefficients and structure coefficients are reported in Table 3.
Table 3
Canonical Correlation Analysis on the GSI-R Subscales and ACSI Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables (Stress Set)</th>
<th>Coef</th>
<th>$r_s$</th>
<th>$r^2_s$ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACAD</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>-.509</td>
<td>25.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV</td>
<td>-.872</td>
<td>-.964</td>
<td>92.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>-.336</td>
<td>-.695</td>
<td>48.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_c$</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>-.573</td>
<td>32.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>-.374</td>
<td>13.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CED</td>
<td>-.727</td>
<td>-.915</td>
<td>83.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>-.403</td>
<td>-.667</td>
<td>44.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 169$. ACAD = Academic Stress; ENV = Environmental Stress; FFS = Family and Financial Stress; CC = Collective Coping; SC = Spiritual Coping; CED = Cognitive and Emotional Debriefing Coping; RC = Ritual Coping; $R^2_c$ = squared canonical correlation, Coef = standardized canonical function coefficient; $r_s$ = structure coefficient; $r^2_s$ = squared structure coefficient. Structure coefficients greater than .45 are in bold.

**Stress, Cognitive Appraisal, and Help-Seeking Intentions**

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether stress and cognitive appraisal predict help-seeking intentions. For this study, stress was examined using the subscales of the GSI-R as predictor variables. The subscales included Academic Stress (ACAD), Environmental Stress (ENV), and Family/Financial Stress (FFS). Seven individual items were adapted to measure cognitive appraisal; however, only three items were extracted to be used as the other predictor variables. The overall measure for help-seeking intentions was used as the dependent variable.

The three cognitive appraisal items selected were based upon their conceptual relationship with stress and help-seeking. One cognitive appraisal item focused on a participants’ rating of how taxing a stressful situation they had was perceived. Another appraisal items focused on action, or what participants thought they could do or change about the situation. A third item focused on control, asking participants if they thought they had control over the
stressful situation. These three appraisal items were combined to create a brief Appraisal Scale to explore the role of appraisal in help-seeking for the purpose of this study.

The predictor variables included for the regression were Academic Stress, Environmental Stress, Family/Financial Stress and the Cognitive Appraisal Scale. All predictor variables were entered into the model simultaneously. The dependent variable entered was the total score on the help-seeking questionnaire, the GHSQ. The results were not statistically significant, which indicated that the combined effects of stress and cognitive appraisal did not predict help-seeking intentions, $R^2 = .05$, $F(4,164) = 2.149$, $p = .077$. In addition, the bivariate correlations for the GHSQ and each type of graduate stress were non-significant, with ACAD ($r = .06$), ENV ($r = .12$) and FFS ($r = .06$). However, the bivariate correlation for the GHSQ and Cognitive Appraisal Scale was statistically significant ($r = .17$). This result indicated that there is a small, positive relationship between help-seeking intentions and cognitive appraisal of stress.

Since the Cognitive Appraisal Scale was created for specific use for this study, and thus is untested, three separate regressions were also conducted as alternatives to further examine the appraisal variable. The regressions used the three GSI-R subscales of Academic Stress, Environmental Stress, and Family/Financial Stress as the predictor variables. Also, each of the appraisal items of Taxing, Action, or Control was entered as a predictor variable one at a time. The GHSQ measure was entered as the dependent variable. Thus, each appraisal item was tested one a time, which may help to identify unique aspects of appraisal that should be examined further in future research.

The results were not statistically significant, which indicated that the combined effects of stress and the Taxing item did not predict help-seeking intentions, $R^2 = .03$, $F(4,163) = 1.187$, $p = .319$. For the Action appraisal item, the results were not statistically significant which indicated
that the combined effects of stress and the Action item did not predict help-seeking intentions, 
\[ R^2 = .04, F(4,163) = 1.893, p = .114. \] Finally, for the Control appraisal item, the results were not statistically significant, which indicated that the combined effects of stress and the Control item did not predict help-seeking intentions, 
\[ R^2 = .02, F(4,164) = .808, p = .521. \]

The Relationship Between Stress and Help-Seeking

Based on the regression results as provided above, two follow-up canonical correlations were employed to further examine the relationship between stress and help-seeking intention, and more specifically intentions about particular help-seeking sources. The first follow-up canonical correlation included the predictor variables comprised of the three GSI-R stress subscales: Academic Stress (ACAD), Environmental Stress (ENV), and Family/Financial Stress (FFS). Also, the predictor variables comprised of all of the help-seeking sources of the GHSQ: Parents, Partner/Significant other, Friends, Relatives, Mental Health Professional, Religious Leader, Medical Professional, Professor/Advisor, Someone Not Listed, and No One. The results indicated a non-statistically significant correlation between the two sets of variates with Wilk’s λ = .774, \( F(30, 446.83) = 1.36, p = .100. \)

The second follow-up canonical correlation examined more specificity of the help-seeking sources. The predictor variables of three GSI-R subscales remained the same (Academic Stress, Environmental Stress, and Family and Financial stress). However, this analysis used the primary help-seeking sources from the GHSQ, which included Parents, Friends, Partners, and Professors, as predictor variables as well. The results indicated a non-statistically significant correlation between the two sets of variates with Wilk’s λ = .954, \( F(12, 428) = .638, p = .810. \)
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine Black graduate students’ experiences of stress and coping. Specifically, this research sought to explore how Black graduate students appraise or evaluate stress, what coping mechanisms are employed, and their intention to seek help from others. Several research questions were designed to explore these areas: (1) What stressors do Black graduate students encounter?, (2) What coping strategies do Black graduate students use?, (3) What sources of help do Black graduate students use? (4) How do Black graduate students appraise stressful situations and make the decision to seek help?, (5) What is the nature of the relationship between stress and coping among Black graduate students?, (6) Does stress and cognitive appraisal predict help-seeking intentions among Black graduate students? This chapter will be divided into sections that will give further explanation of the major findings, provide implications for the findings, discuss limitations of the study, and identify future directions for future research.

Black Graduate Students and Perceived Stress

Overall, Black graduate students perceived graduate school to be moderately stressful. Specifically, as a whole, this sample of Black graduate students perceived academic and family/monetary experiences to be moderately stressful, while environmental experiences were perceived to be stressful. Specific demographic variables were examined to further understand perceived stress among Black graduate students. When looking at gender differences on perceived stress experiences, men and women did not appear to differ regarding their overall indication of stress, nor for the three types of graduate stress (e.g., Academic, Environmental, and Family/Financial).
Another demographic variable of interest was the potential difference between master’s students and doctoral students and their perceived experiences of stress, both overall and for the three specific types. Only one difference occurred between master’s and doctoral students regarding family and financial stress. This may be attributed to the differences in financial cost for pursuing a master’s degree versus a doctoral degree, where there may be less financial scholarship or assistantship opportunity for master-level students compared to doctoral-level students.

A final demographic variable, whether or not participants thought about leaving their graduate programs, was explored. The findings suggest that there is a difference between those who thought about leaving the graduate program and the level of overall perceived graduate stress compared to those who did not think about leaving. In addition, there was also a difference between those who thought about leaving the graduate program for all three graduate stress types (Academic, Environmental, and Family/Financial) compared to those who did not think about leaving. Those who considered leaving reported higher levels of stress overall, as well as higher levels of each specific stressor.

In sum, the findings regarding Black graduate students’ experiences of stress are aligned with previous research regarding general graduate education experiences and specific experiences for Black graduate students. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the overall pursuit of graduate education brings forth many demands that can create stress. Researchers (e.g., Clark et al., 2009; Hyun et al., 2006; Stozier et al., 2003) have noted that graduate education can impose stressful demands such as the level of academic work load, financial and employment concerns, burnout, and navigating professional academic relationships. Moreover, Black graduate students face additional stress-related experience due to being a racial and ethnic minority (Barker, 2011;
Wilkinson et al., 2014). Further, the current study’s findings regarding the level of perceived stress and the thought about leaving their graduate program continue to add to the narrative that Lovitts (1996, 2001) described with consistently high attrition rates, for doctoral students in particular, due to reasons related to academic, personal, and financial concerns. University personnel and graduate programs are encouraged to look more closely at the impact that general stress and race-related stress can have on Black graduate students and to identify preventative steps to help reduce stress that could potentially lead to attrition.

**Black Graduate Students and Help-Seeking Intentions**

The findings of the current study revealed that, overall, Black graduate students are somewhat likely to seek help from others. This finding is consistent across two areas within the study, the GHSQ responses and the additional demographic questions that asked about frequency of seeking help when needed. Specifically, approximately half of the sample (45.6%) reported that they “sometimes” seek help, followed by “seldom” seek help (31.4%), then “often” seek help (20.7%), and “not at all” (2.4%) do they seek help. When looking further at specific sources of help, participants in this sample are likely to seek help from parents, friends, and partners/spouses.

The findings from the current study are consistent with other literature (e.g., Stefl & Prosperi, 1985) that highlight multiple factors that may influence seeking help, including accessibility, availability, and acceptability. As such, parents, friends, and partners may be considered as accessible, available, and accepting of a person’s need to seek help. The choice of these specific sources of helpers also connects to the important understanding of cultural components to seeking help, such as the reliance on collective coping with close others (Chun et al., 2006; Parham et al., 2000). However, it is also important to acknowledge cultural
phenomena related to the Strong Black Woman and the Cool Pose. Research (e.g., Harrington et al., 2010; Watson & Hunter, 2015) has indicated for the Black women there is cultural narrative of the need to handle one’s own stress, which may prevent them from seeking help. Likewise, for Black men, the literature (e.g., Major & Billson, 1992) notes they may have a tendency to minimize the need for help in order to protect their identity. The qualitative findings regarding cognitive appraisal may have reflected examples of self-reliance through participants’ reports of feeling like they needed to handle it own their own and the fear of being viewed as incapable by others when seeking help.

An interesting finding was that this sample of Black graduate students reported that they would be unlikely to seek help from a religious leader. Historically, spirituality and religion has played a central role as serving as the beacon of light, hope, and a dependable source for many individual and families through various means among the African American community (Adkison-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Wallace & Constantine, 2005; Lesniak, Rudman, Rector, & Elkin, 2006). However, Black graduate students who are in residential programs that required them to move away from the community of origin to a new city may have limited access to a religious community. While away from their family and familiar support networks, students may have a difficult time finding new religious communities to be a part of and a place for seeking help.

**Black Graduate Students and Africultural Coping**

The findings for this study revealed that the coping strategies used a lot by this particular sample of Black graduate students were collective coping, spiritual coping, and cognitive-emotional debriefing. The least used coping strategy among the sample was ritual coping. No gender difference was detected for the different coping strategies. However, there was a group
difference detected between those who thought about leaving their program and those who did not based on the cognitive-emotional debriefing coping strategy use. This use of the cognitive-emotional debriefing coping strategy and participants’ thoughts about leaving program may indicate that when environmental stressors expend personal resources for coping, Black graduate students may question whether to leave or stay.

Although there is limited literature regarding specific use of Africultural coping strategies, the findings in this study were consistent with other research indicating certain Africultural coping strategies, such as spiritual, collective, and cognitive-emotional debriefing, being more prominently endorsed. For example, Lewis-Cole and Constantine (2006) examined different types of race-related stress, such as cultural, institutional, and individual, and Africultural coping use for African American men and women. The researchers found that for institutional race-related stress, African American women tended to use spiritual, collective, and cognitive-emotional debriefing coping strategies. As for African American men, collective coping was used for cultural race-related stress (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006).

**Black Graduate Students’ Appraisal of Stress and the Decision to Seek Help**

One of the central focuses for this study was to examine secondary cognitive appraisal, which refers to the evaluation of the negative person-environment interaction that creates stress, particularly evaluation of what needs to be done, potential consequences of action, and making a decision to act (Lazarus, 2000). A general thematic analysis of two open-ended questions that sought to understand how Black graduate students appraised stressful situations and their thoughts regarding the consequences for seeking help generated several common themes, as discussed in Chapter IV. The first finding revealed that this sample of Black graduate students appear to appraise their stressful situations with the major themes falling under four main areas.
of consideration: (1) the severity or importance of the stressful situation, (2) the source of help, (3) their self, and (4) spiritual consideration.

In other words, Black graduate students sought to determine if the stressful situation was important or severe enough to seek help. Consideration about who could understand their situation, the relationship they had with that person, and trustworthiness of that person were also important factors. Further, this sample of Black graduate students evaluated their ability to handle the situation and how they would be viewed by others should they choose to seek help. Finally, this sample of Black graduate students evaluated their stressful situation using faith or spiritual practices.

The ideas expressed by this sample of Black graduate students connect within the theoretical framework regarding cognitive appraisal, coping, and planned behaviors. First, the findings connect to the important collective, or interpersonal, efforts that are central to Moos’ (1984) integrative model of stress and coping, as well as key Africultural coping principles (Chun et al., 2006; Parham et al., 2000). In addition, the theme of using spirituality as a practice to cope is considered another key element in Africultural philosophy (Mattis & Watson, 2009).

The second finding revealed that Black graduate students do think about the consequences to seeking help when stressful situations occur. Specifically, three major themes were generated for this sample of Black graduate students regarding (1) fear of judgment, (2) being viewed as incapable, and (3) lack of trust in the potential helper. Several aspects of the Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior connect with these general themes. In thinking about consequences of a particular behavior, such as seeking help, a person is expected to consider the approval or disapproval of an important figure, as well as the positive or negative outcome (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, existing qualitative literature regarding Black graduate students’
experiences (Gildersleeve at el., 2011; Torres et al., 2010) revealed that Black graduate students’ 
have apprehension about the perceptions of being viewed or labeled as incapable of handling 
difficult tasks or unworthy to be in their graduate programs.

Other major findings regarding the appraisal of stress were found in the seven 
independent items, which were derived from Hoggard et al. (2012) and Folkman and Lazarus 
(1986), and the Appraisal Scale that used three of the seven items developed for specific use in 
this study. Four of the seven items focused on successful coping, accepting the situation, 
information needed, and holding self back from action. These four items were not included in the 
cognitive appraisal scale because of the emphasis on passive responses to the stressful situation. 
However, three items were conceptually related to help-seeking and stress based on demand of 
personal resources and proactive steps for addressing the stressful situation. The findings 
revealed that Black graduate students appraising, or evaluating their situation and what they can 
or need to do about the situation. When thinking about their stress, the findings revealed that the 
nature of how taxing a stressful situation was, appeared to be an important feature of the 
appraisal process.

In addition, Black graduate students may also be thinking about stereotype threat, which 
is when an individual believes that they are at risk for confirming a negative stereotype about 
their racial group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Within higher education, Black graduate students 
may feel a need to prove one’s place in the system, thus not readily seeking help or not seeking 
help as often as needed. In the present sample, approximately half of the participants reported 
only seeking needed help “sometimes.” Historically, the narrative regarding the “Strong Black 
Woman” or the “Cool Pose” fits the choice to conceal stress as a means to “save face” or to 
appear capable in a certain manner (Beauboef-Lofontant, 2009; Major & Billson, 1992).
Current findings are consistent with the idea that there may be an overall cost to seeking help from others. According to Lee (2002), the cost of seeking help from others is threatening to the help-seeker in that it may show the person as less than, unskilled, and dependent on others. Consistent across the two open-ended questions pertaining to thoughts about stressful situations and consequences of seeking help was the theme of trustworthiness of the potential helper. This sample of Black graduate students emphasized the considerations about the confidentiality of sharing personal and vulnerable information with someone. This finding conveys a potential appraisal of the importance of an interpersonal relationship with the potential helper. When seeking help, the cost or consequence of appearing inadequate or incapable lessens when there is perceived trust in the potential help-seeker (Hoffmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009). However, the research regarding interpersonal dynamics regarding help-seeking is limited. (Hoffman et al., 2009). Thus, for Black graduate students, cognitive appraisal of stress and the intention to seek help take into consideration not the just the event at hand, but also the personal consequences that could potential affect their character or certain identity aspects.

**Relationship Between Stress and Coping**

Another question sought to examine the relationship between stress and coping. Based on the canonical correlation analysis, there was a moderate relationship between graduate student stress and Africultural coping strategies. In other words, when this sample of Black graduate students experienced more stress, more use of Africultural coping strategies were employed. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the act of implementing a coping strategy is based on the one’s evaluation that the demand, or stress, they are experiencing has exceeded their own resources. Further, coping strategies are viewed as responses to relieve stress, in which the overall outcome is considered a coping goal for the person (Chun et al., 2006; Nesteruk &
Garrison, 2005). Thus, stress and coping may be seen as interdependent, as one impacts the other. An area future research may be exploring the types of coping, such as problem-focused or emotion-focused based on the stressors presented.

When looking at the multivariate relationship between stress and Africultural coping, environmental stress and cognitive-emotional debriefing were the primary contributors for this sample of Black graduate students. According to Utsey et. al (2000), the cognitive-emotional debriefing is designed as an adaptive mechanism to mitigate environmental stressors. Based on the items that comprised the cognitive-emotional debriefing subscale, it appears to indicate that this sample of Black graduate students tend to try to distract themselves from thinking about environmental stressors that can be present at a university every day.

In general, Black Americans tend to experience greater exposure to environmental stressors than the general population due to historical and systemic issues related to race (Daly, Jennings, Beckette, & Leashore, 1995). Pertaining to the academic environment, perceptions of university or program climates include students’ experiences and interaction as racial minorities, such as discrimination, microaggressions, and lack of support and diversity on campus (Reid & Radharkishnan, 2003). These environmental factors of a university or program setting can have impacts on psychological factors, such as stress (Reid & Radharkishnan, 2003). The findings in this study connect to the qualitative study by Lewis et al. (2004) which found that Black doctoral experienced isolation, lack of diversity, and difficulty navigating the academic system own their own.

One observation for this particular sample is that the region the target schools are located in may contribute to environmental stress for Black graduate students. Particularly, large universities within the Mid-west region may be considered “college towns”, where the university
makes a large portion of the community. Thus, this also may contribute to certain environmental stressors, such as learning how to integrate life within a new city that may also lack diversity.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, The Environmental System Panel II of the integrative model of stress and coping highlights that cultural and social norms of environment, individualism or collectivism, are important factors for a person to consider when trying to figure out how to navigate the environment (Chun et al., 2006). Further examination of how primary appraisal, or the evaluation of one’s values, goals, and beliefs about the world, is associated with environmental stress is warranted.

**Stress and Cognitive Appraisal Predicting Help-Seeking**

The final research question examined whether stress and cognitive appraisal predicted help-seeking intentions. Stress and cognitive appraisal did not predict help-seeking intention, which did not support what the researcher expected. Moreover, the simple bivariate correlations between the stress variables and help-seeking intentions did not correlate as expected. However, help-seeking intentions was correlated with the cognitive appraisal variable, which may imply that some thought will be given to what help is needed for stressful situations. Help-seeking intentions also correlated with each of the four Africultural coping strategies, which may indicate that help-seeking might be viewed as a particular type of coping and not a distinct variable separate from coping.

The above outcome also connects back to the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 regarding stress. Based on the Transitory Conditions (Panel III) within the integrative model of stress and coping, how one thinks about stress or stressful situations is grounded in cultural contexts of individualism or collectivism (Chun et al., 2006). This may indicate that if a person experiences their stress within an individualistic context, then it may not initially prompt them to...
seek help from others since there is a cultural narrative to problem-solve on their own. More specific research regarding how Black graduate students appraise stressful situations within the context of culture related to individualism and collectivism is of importance.

Essentially, the understanding of this particular result may have connection to the qualitative component of this study of exploring the appraisal themes for this sample of Black graduate students. It appears that help-seeking may be more influenced by cognitive appraisal of possible outcomes, rather than by level of perceived stress. The findings from the qualitative data of this study suggest that a person seeking help may consider how the potential outcome, whether positive or negative, could impact them personally. Again, this connects to Ajzen’s (1991) theory of how attitudes affect behaviors, particularly anticipated consequences of employing a behavior, such as seeking help.

In addition, there is limited understanding regarding the GHSQ measure. Particularly, there may be concerns related to scoring the help-seeking intention measure. The low reliability obtained for this sample of Black graduate students suggests the measure may not be adaptable for racial/ethnic minority populations. For example, the qualitative findings revealed that some participants in this sample described the use of spiritual or faith practices when evaluating stressful situation. Relating this to the GHSQ, one of the sources listed is religious figure, such as priest or pastor, which is fundamentally different from the source as God or higher power. Participants also clearly reported that decisions regarding help seeking varied depending on the potential source of help. This was reflected in both quantitative and qualitative findings, suggesting the low internal consistency obtained on the GHSQ may be an accurate reflection of the variation in endorsement of help seeking across sources.
Two follow-up canonical correlation analyses were conducted, in hopes of further examining the relationship between stress and help-seeking intentions. In the first analysis, the variables investigated were types of graduate student stress (e.g., Academic, Environmental, and Family/Financial) and several help-seeking sources (e.g., Parents, Friends, Partners, Mental Health Professionals, Professors, etc.). In the second analysis, three types of graduate stress and only the primary four sources (Parents, Friends, Partners, and Professors) were examined. Both canonical correlations did not reveal a correlation between the types of stress and help-seeking sources. This finding may further indicate a measurement concern regarding the help-seeking intentions and sources of help for this sample.

Interestingly, what is gathered from the help-seeking outcomes of this study is that the source of help may not necessarily be evaluated by the title or role of a potential helper, as indicated through the GHSQ, but rather by the interpersonal relationship or characteristics of the helper which was indicated in the qualitative portion of the study. Specifically, this sample evaluated a potential helper’s previous experience of a similar stressful experience as evidence they would be able to join in with them; this sample also expressed concern about the trustworthiness of potential helpers. Further investigation of specific types of help-seeking that were mentioned in Chapter II, such as academic help-seeking, health help-seeking, and psychological help-seeking may provide more insight to help-seeking intention rather than sources, or roles of a potential helper.

Implications for Future Education Practices

This study was exploratory and descriptive in order to understand the stress and coping experiences of Black graduate students. Of particular interest to the study was the examination of secondary cognitive appraisal of stress and the decision processes related to seeking help from
others. Based on the major findings described above, this research has implications for higher education practices within graduate education. Specifically, two primary areas that this research can contribute to are faculty-student interactions and campus or program climate.

Advisement can be seen as a time where faculty and student engage in a series of meetings pertaining to program trajectory, professional development and training, and career guidance. Faculty-student relationships are a central aspect to maintaining a student’s retention and creating welcoming, supportive atmospheres that are vital to one’s matriculation (O’Keefe, 2013). There can be many factors that can improve or alienate students from interacting with faculty or advisors. According to Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010), students are more motivated academically when faculty members are perceived as being approachable, available outside of classroom, open to informal interactions, and respectful of the student. The role of a graduate student advisor is not always clear-cut, differs from undergraduate interactions and needs, and varies between master-level and doctoral-level students (Selke & Wong, 1993). However, when it comes to faculty-student interactions for Black graduate students there may be additional psychosocial and identity layers that suggest the need for a different approach, such as through mentorship.

Black graduate students may not readily seek out help and may internalize stressful situations while going through their graduate programs. They may or may not speak up about environmental stressors that impact them. Thus, it is vital for graduate faculty to begin to create and implement proactive outreach initiatives to engage with Black graduate students’. This notion comes from the idea of moving from the standard tasks applied to being a faculty advisor and moving into position of being a mentor that is proactive in reaching out to students in various ways (Cobb, Zamboanga, Xie, Meca, Schwartz, & Sanders, 2018). Some aspects of
academic advisement may seem formal and centered on academic outcomes, whereas mentorship relationships can be either formal or informal, and add differing psychosocial and interpersonal dynamics.

Selke and Wong (1993) developed a mentoring-empowerment model for graduate student advisement that consisted of key characteristics that faculty members should consider. These characteristics include serving as a role model, encourager, nurturer, teacher, and counselor (Selke & Wong, 1993). Further, when thinking about faculty-student interactions, intersecting identities, such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ability are important contextual factors that shape the nature of interactions between faculty and student (Scholosser & Foley, 2008). As mentioned in the study, this sample of Black graduate students were appraising their source of help as a trustworthy person and citing a fear of judgment. Creating interpersonal relationship through mentorship may aid in developing trust between Black graduate students and faculty members that in the end may help Black graduate feel more comfortable to approach faculty in times of need. Thus, faculty need to be aware of and continuously seek multicultural competence training experiences when working with students of various backgrounds (Cobb et al., 2018; Schlosser & Foley, 2008).

In addition to graduate programs continuously being mindful regarding the development of effective faculty-student interactions, awareness about the graduate program environment and general campus climate is vital. University campuses are their own, unique communities that function with their own set of histories, policies, social customs, and physical structures, all while integrating in socio-political factors such as race (Chavous, 2005). This idea is consistent with the description of the Environmental System Panel of Moos’ (1984) integrative model of stress and coping set within a cultural context (Chun et al., 2006) that highlights the importance
of understanding the way in which the environment can influence a person’s behaviors based on the social norms and social resources available.

One of the findings of the current study revealed a relationship between environmental stress and the use of cognitive-debriefing coping strategy. As noted in Chapter 1, research (e.g., Gasman et al., 2008; Spivey-Mooring & Apprey, 2014; Torres et al., 2010) has indicated that Black graduate students experience difficult campus climates due to being a racial/ethnic minority, lack of diversity representation, and race-related stressors. However, there is an absence of literature regarding diversity concerns and campus climate issues for graduate education (Ward & Zarate, 2015).

Based on the literature that is available, researchers are citing student affairs representative and graduate college administrators as an important starting ground for graduate education concerns. Specifically, there is a call to engage in continuous monitoring of the general campus climate and diversity representation in graduate students and faculty for recruitment and retention purposes (Griffin, Muniz, & Espinosa, 2012; Karkouti, 2015). One of the foundations for understanding campus climate is to review educational policies at the macro-level (e.g., government and university policies) and the micro-level (e.g., graduate schools and departments) that may have impacts on the general campus climate and structures that are in currently in place (Griffin et al., 2012). This may include looking to hiring policies and practices, as well as graduate admission procedures for individual programs. In addition, university and graduate department personnel are encouraged to engage in multicultural competence training in order to assess potential barriers that are in place, particularly for racial and ethnic minority students (Karkouti, 2015). Through multicultural training, university personnel can continue to engage in
dialogue regarding privilege and oppression, as well as their own cultural values as an individual and a department or unit on the university campus (Griffin et al., 2012; Karkouti, 2015).

**Limitations**

There are several limitations regarding this study. One limitation is the sampling procedure. The sampling procedure used for this study employed purposive and snowball sampling. With the purposive sampling, specific institutions were pre-selected based on particular educational classifications (e.g., size, variety of degree types, research activity). This method of selection is a good strategy because it allows for access to otherwise difficult populations. However, the institutions who ultimately agreed to assist with recruitment were both predominantly White institutions in the Midwest. Although a broader sampling of geographical region and institution type was planned, the obtained sample imposes caution about the generalizability of the results and conclusions of this study.

A second limitation was the use of an on-line survey. For on-line survey research, there is a lack of control for the survey-taking situations among the participants as compared to paper and pencil administration of survey. One aspect of control that is lost through on-line survey methods is not knowing if potential participants who are ineligible or do not meet criteria are actually taking the survey. Also, with on-line surveys, the researcher does not fully know where participants may be recruited from, particular through the on-line method. Finally, there is no fool-proof indication of participants taking the survey more than one time. However, on-line survey methods are beneficial because they allow for local, regional, and national data collection. Also, the on-line survey method is beneficial because it fits with the current trend of technology use and quick access for students.
A third limitation was the use of self-report measures. Using self-report measures and recall of information can create concerns about accuracy of recalled experiences. Also, social desirability may be a factor in the response to some of the measures. However, self-report measures are helpful because they take into account the subjective experiences of how people are thinking, feeling, and interpreting what occurs for them. These subjective experiences were the core focus for this study.

A fourth limitation was the participants’ responses regarding stressful experiences. Survey questions pertaining to stress asked participants to recall stressful situations they encountered within the last 2 weeks. There were no other directives for participants to consider about the nature of the stressful situation to recall. Thus, participants’ appeared to recall stressful situations in which they believed to have successfully coped with that situation. This outcome may limit the ideas related to cognitive appraisal and help-seeking due to the situations being resolved easily and without the need of others. Also, the short time frame to recall information may have limited the participants’ choice of stressful situations that occurred beyond that 2-week time frame.

A fifth limitation was the utility of the measures being used based on their existing psychometric properties. The research and factor analyses on the GSI-R, ACSI, and GHSQ has yielded moderate reliability estimates and preliminary evidence of construct validity. No published scale to measure cognitive appraisal was identified for this study. Items for cognitive appraisal were selected from previous research and developed to fit the existing theory of stress and coping presented. The cognitive appraisal items for this study were used more as a cohesive indicator/preliminary measure rather than single data points. Since there is a lack of measures to assess cognitive appraisal, there is difficulty in assessing this construct unless it is assessed under
specific conditions. The data collected in this current study may be useful in further developing a measure for assessing cognitive appraisal.

**Directions for Future Studies**

There are several recommendations for future studies regarding the stress and coping experiences of Black graduate students, and more specifically examining cognitive appraisal and help-seeking intentions. The first recommendation is to explore the experiences of stress and coping for Black graduate students that attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The unique aspect of HBCUs is its emphasis on the students as the primary focus and the collective that aids in student support and retention, which can be synonymous with an experience of being in a village or community of people (Harris, 2012). Specifically, Harris (2012) states that HBCUs employ a village pedagogy, in which the teaching and interactions from faculty to student occur in, from, and through a community-orientated environmental system. A study by Fountaine (2012) suggested that faculty-student engagement are important factors for Black doctoral students’ experiences and persistence within their programs at HBCUs. Thus, further investigation regarding this particular population may be of importance to understand more about their experiences, types of stressors that are encountered and help-seeking intentions that occur.

A second recommendation would be to assess specific questions regarding the nature of stressful events to recall. For example, it may be beneficial to direct participants’ recall of stressful situations within two specified contexts such as a situation within graduate school and a situation that occurred outside of graduate school, but may have impacted some aspect of their graduate school experience. Having both examples can allow for more understanding of type of stress situation that graduate students may encounter and the ways in which those different
situations are managed from a students’ perspective. Another consideration for future studies would be to give the directive for participants to consider stressful situations within a 6-month time frame to allow participants more options of situations to recall in their decisions. Finally, it may be helpful to consider the severity of the stressful situation, specifically focusing on situations for which assistance was needed.

A third recommendation is to utilize a different help-seeking intention measure that may be available or to develop a more viable help-seeking intention measure. It would also be of interest to examine types of help-seeking domains, such as academic help-seeking, psychological help-seeking, health help-seeking versus identifying a particular help-seeking source. In addition, it may be useful to further explore more interpersonal dynamics of help-seeking, such as trustworthiness and approachability. A fourth recommendation is to further explore the concept of cognitive appraisal and to develop a tool for cognitive appraisal of stress and help-seeking. A more in-depth qualitative study would be valuable to more fully explore the cognitive appraisal since there is a lack of psychometrically sound cognitive appraisal measures.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: March 6, 2017

To: Mary Z. Anderson, Principal Investigator
Shealyn Blanchard, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 17-02-38

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Black Graduate Students’ Experiences of Stress and Coping” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”.) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 5, 2018
Appendix B

Initial E-Mail Contact to Prospective Research Sites
Dear [Name of Individual],

Hello! My name is Shealyn Blanchard. I am counseling psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am currently in the process of exploring some ideas of how to best prepare to collect data for my dissertation under the supervision of Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. My dissertation is focused on Black graduate students. More specifically, I am interested in their perceived experiences of stress, their coping strategies, and their help-seeking intentions.

I am writing to seek your assistance for how I could best accomplish recruiting participants for my study from [university]. I was redirected to your office by [name of person; office within the university] for assistance. I selected [university] as a recruitment site as I am interested in including students from a variety of disciplines, such as the Colleges of Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Engineering, Education, Sciences and Arts. I am hoping that you would be able to forward an invitation to participate in my study from your office to students who may be eligible to participate. It would also be helpful for you to forward the invitation to other offices and departments on campus for their dissemination of the invitation to participate in my study. I anticipate beginning recruitment towards the [beginning, middle, or end] of [name of month].

I will call within the next week to inquire whether you are able to assist me. If you wish to contact me before then, I would be more than happy to talk with you via phone or e-mail. I can be reached at (732) 236-6834 or shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Shealyn J. Blanchard
Doctoral Student
Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
Appendix C

Initial Participant Recruitment E-mail Script
Dear [Names of Graduate College/School Personnel, Department Chairs, Training Directors, or Organization Leaders, List-Serve Groups]

My name is Shealyn Blanchard and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am currently seeking assistance in recruitment for my dissertation which focuses on the stress experience, responses to stress, evaluation of stress, and help-seeking intentions for Black graduate students. This study is being directly supervised by Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. This study has undergone review from Western Michigan University’s Institutional Review Board and has been approved (HSIRB Approval # 17-02-38).

If you would be willing, I am asking that you please forward the information below to students that may be interested:

Hello! My name is Shealyn Blanchard and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in a study about your experiences of stress during graduate school, how you think about stress, and the ways you manage stress.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must (a) self-identify as a part of the African Diaspora (e.g., African American, Black, African, Afro-Caribbean), (b) be currently enrolled in a Master’s, Doctoral, or Professional degree-granting program, (c) have completed at least one (1) semester of graduate education, (d) be enrolled in an “in-person” graduate degree program

The survey is anticipated to take approximately 20 minutes. For the completion of the survey and your time, there is an opportunity to enter into a drawing for one (1) of fifteen (15) Amazon gift cards in the amount of $25.00.

Please see the attached flyer for additional information about the study. If you are interested in participating in this study, please follow the link to the survey: [link to survey will be included]

For questions or more information about this study, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu or (732) 236-6834. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at mary.anderson@wmich.edu or (269) 387-5113.

Thank you for your time and consideration in assisting me with this effort.

Sincerely,
Shealyn J. Blanchard, MA
Doctoral Student
Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu
Appendix D

Follow-Up Participant Recruitment E-mail Script
Dear [Names of Graduate College/School Personnel, Department Chairs, Training Directors, or Organization Leaders, List-Serve Groups]

My name is Shealyn Blanchard and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am currently seeking assistance in recruitment for my dissertation which focuses on the stress experience, responses to stress, evaluation of stress, and help-seeking intentions for Black graduate students. This study is being directly supervised by Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. This study has undergone review from Western Michigan University’s Institutional Review Board and has been approved (HSIRB Approval # 17-02-38).

If you would be willing, I am asking that you please forward the information below to students that may be interested:

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Hello! My name is Shealyn Blanchard and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in a study about your experiences of stress during graduate school, how you think about stress, and the ways you manage stress. If you have already taken this survey, thank you for your time and please refrain from taking the survey again. However, I invite you to pass the information forward to others who may be eligible.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must (a) self-identify as a part of the African Diaspora (e.g., African American, Black, African, Afro-Caribbean), (b) be currently enrolled in a Master’s, Doctoral, or Professional degree-granting program, (c) have completed at least one (1) semester of graduate education, (d) be enrolled in an “in-person” graduate degree program.

The survey is anticipated to take approximately 20 minutes. For the completion of the survey and your time, there is an opportunity to enter into a drawing for one (1) of fifteen (15) Amazon gift cards in the amount of $25.00.

Please see the attached flyer for additional information about the study. If you are interested in participating in this study, please follow the link to the survey: [link to survey will be included]

For questions or more information about this study, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu or (732) 236-6834. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at mary.anderson@wmich.edu or (269) 387-5113.

Thank you for your time and consideration in assisting me with this effort.

Sincerely,
Shealyn J. Blanchard, MA
Doctoral Student
Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu
Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer and Social Media Posting
Do you self-identify as a part of the African Diaspora (e.g., African American, Black, African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino/a)?

Are you currently enrolled in a Master’s, Doctoral, or Professional degree program?

Have you completed at least one (1) semester of graduate school?

Is your graduate program a traditional, residential (in-person), program?

If you answered YES to all of these questions, then you are eligible to participate in this study!

Purpose: To understand Black graduate students’ experiences of stress during graduate school, ways of thinking about stress, and ways about managing stress.

Time Requirement: Approximately 20 minutes.

Where: At the location of your convenience! The survey is on-line.

Compensation: For your time, you will have an opportunity to enter into a drawing to win one (1) of fifteen (15) Amazon gift cards in the amount of $25.00.

If you are interested in learning more about the study, then check out the link: [link to survey will be included]

Please feel free to pass this information along to anyone you know that may be eligible and interested.

*This research is being conducted under the direct supervision of Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. This study has been reviewed and approved by Western Michigan University’s Institutional Review Board (HSIRB Approval # 17-02-38). For more information about this study or questions, please feel to contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu or (732) 236-6834. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at mary.anderson@wmich.edu or (269) 387-5113.
Appendix F

Informed Consent
Western Michigan University  
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

**Principal Investigator:** Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.
**Student Investigator:** Shealyn J. Blanchard, M.A.
**Title of Study:** Black Graduate Students’ Experiences of Stress and Coping
**HSBIRB Project Number:** 17-02-38

You have been invited to participate in a research project on “Black Graduate Students’ Experiences of Stress and Coping.” This project will serve as Shealyn Blanchard’s dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in counseling psychology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely, and ask questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The purpose of this study is to further understand Black graduate students’ experiences of stress, ways of thinking about stress, and ways of managing stress.

**Who can participate in this study?**

In order to be a participant of this study, you must: (a) self-identify as a part of the African Diaspora (e.g., African American, Black, African, Afro-Caribbean), (b) be currently enrolled in a Master’s, Doctoral, or Professional degree-granting program within the United States, (c) have completed at least one (1) semester of graduate school, and (d) be enrolled in an “in-person” graduate degree program.

You are not eligible to participate in this study if you are: (a) enrolled in a non-degree seeking (e.g., certificate) graduate program, (b) enrolled in an on-line graduate degree program, (c) enrolled in a graduate degree program outside of the United States, or (d) are not currently enrolled in a graduate program.

**Where will this study take place?**

This study is conducted on-line. You may take the survey on a computer, tablet, or cell phone in a location at your convenience.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

It is anticipated that the survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. This is a one-time survey.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**
You will also be asked to complete a series of questions related to your personal and academic experiences, experiences of stress, coping, and problem solving. The survey consists of multiple choice questions, as well as some short fill-ins.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

This study will collect information about your personal, academic, employment, and family demographics. Also, information regarding the types of stressors that are faced in graduate school, various coping strategies, problem solving strategies, and help-seeking will be collected.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There is minimal to no risk associated with participating in this study. The minimal risk is that mild uncomfortable feelings may arise due to recalling personal experiences throughout your graduate training.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

There are no immediate known personal benefits to participating in this study. However, the results of this study have the potential to add to the underrepresented literature on Black graduate students. In addition, findings from this study may also provide programmatic recommendations for implementation for graduate programs to help Black graduate student persistence and retention.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

The only known cost for participating in this study is the personal time it will take to complete the survey.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**

At the end of the survey, you will have the option to enter into a drawing. You must complete the entire survey in order to enter the drawing. If you choose to enter the drawing, you must follow the link on the last page of the survey. The link will redirect you to another webpage where you will be required to submit only your e-mail address. There will be an opportunity to win one (1) of fifteen (15) Amazon gift cards in the amount of $25.00. Eight (8) winners will be drawn after 100 surveys have been completed. The final seven (7) winners will be drawn after 150 surveys have been completed. E-mail addresses will be drawn at random. The e-mail addresses cannot be linked to the surveys in order to ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participants. The winners will be sent the gift card via the e-mail provided. Participants who did not win in the drawing will also be informed that the drawing has been completed.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**

Your confidentiality and privacy are very important. Your responses to the survey are completely anonymous. You will only be identified by a pre-generated Research ID number provided by the
on-line survey system. No information provided can be linked to your name or academic records. Full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the chances of people passing by a public computer station and observing the computer screen. During the course of this study, the primary investigator and the student investigator will be the only persons who will have access to the information collected.

The results of this study will be published as a dissertation. There is also potential for the results to be presented at professional conferences, and/or published in scientific journals. As a participant in this study, you have the right to request a summary of the results that are gathered at the conclusion of this study. Should you be interested in receiving a summary report, please contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

Your responses to the survey will be completely anonymous. When you start the survey, you are consenting to participate in this study. If you do not agree to participate in this study, simply exit the survey now. If, after beginning the survey, you decide that you do not wish to continue, you may stop at any time. By ending the survey early and deciding to not complete the survey in its entirety, means you are withdrawing from the study and your responses will not be used. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at (732) 236-6834 or shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu, or the principal investigator, Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. at (269) 387-5113 or mary.anderson@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on March 6, 2017. Please do not participate in this study after March 5, 2018.

Participating in this online survey indicates your consent for use of answers that you supply.
Appendix G

Background Sheet
1. Race/Ethnicity
   African American
   Black
   African
   Afro-Caribbean
   Afro-Latino/a
   Other, please specify___________________________

2. Age
   ____________________________________________

3. Gender
   Man
   Woman
   Transgender
   Gender-Neutral
   Other, please specify_____________________________

4. Type of institution you currently attend?
   o Pre-Dominantly White Institution
   o Historically Black College or University

5. Degree Sought
   o M.A.
   o M.S.
   o M.Ed.
   o M.S.W.
   o Ph.D.
   o J.D.
   o M.D.
   o Psy.D.
   o Ed.D.
   o D.D.S.
   o Pharm.D.
   o Other: ________________________________

6. Degree Program Discipline (e.g., History, Counseling Psychology, Biology, Chemistry,)
   ____________________________________________

7. What is your student enrollment status?
   o Part-Time
   o Full-Time
8. What year are you in the program?
   - 1st Year
   - 2nd Year
   - 3rd Year
   - 4th Year
   - 5th Year
   - 6th Year
   - 7th Year
   - 8th Year and Beyond

9. Anticipated length of your degree program
   - 1 – 2 years
   - 2 – 3 years
   - 3 – 4 years
   - 4 – 5 years
   - 6 – 7 years
   - 7 years or more

10. Activities you are involved in beyond courses (select all that apply)
    - Research Assistant
    - Teaching Assistant
    - Clinical Rotation/Practicums
    - Graduate Assistant
    - Others, please specify:

11. Are you a member of any organizations for African American/Black graduate students?
    - YES
    - NO

12. What type of undergraduate institution did you receive your Bachelor’s degree from?
    - Historically Black College or University
    - Pre-Dominantly White Institution

13. Is your academic advisor/chair of the same race/ethnicity as you?
    - YES
    - NO
    - I DO NOT KNOW

14. Have you ever thought about leaving your current program?
    - YES
    - NO

15. Relationship Status?
    - Single
    - Married
16. Number of children?
   - Zero
   - One
   - Two
   - Three
   - Four or more

17. Do you have any impairments, activity limitations, and/or participations restrictions?
   - YES
   - NO

18. Are you employed outside of school?
   - YES
   - NO

19. If you are employed outside of school, how many of hours per week do you work?
   - 10-15 hours
   - 15-20 hours
   - 20-25 hours
   - 25-30 hours
   - 30 hours and more
   - I am not employed outside of school

20. What is your level of income (include assistantship stipends, employment earnings)?
   - Less than $10,000
   - Between $20,000 – $30,000
   - Between $30,000 – $40,000
   - Between $40,000 – $50,000
   - Between $50,000 – $60,000
   - Between $60,000 – $70,000
   - Between $70,000 – $80,000
   - Between $80,000 – $90,000
   - Between $90,000 – $100,000
   - More than $100,000

21. Mother’s level of education?
   - Some high school
   - High school
   - Some College
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Master’s Degree
22. Father’s level of education?
   - Some high school
   - High school
   - Some College
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Master’s Degree
   - Doctorate/Professional Degree
Appendix H

The GSI-R (Rocha-Singh, 1994)
**Directions:** Please rate your perceived experience of stress in relation to various events encountered in graduate school using the scale below. If you have never experienced one of the events listed, please leave the item blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>Not All Stressful</th>
<th>Moderately Stressful</th>
<th>Extremely Stressful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fulfilling responsibilities at home and at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trying to meet peers of your race/ethnicity on campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Taking exams</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Being obligated to participate in family functions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Arranging childcare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Finding support groups sensitive to your needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Fear of failing to meet program expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Participating in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Meeting with faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Living in the local community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Handling relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Handling the academic workload</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Peers treating you unlike the way they treat each other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Faculty treating you differently from your peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Writing papers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Paying monthly expenses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Family having money problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Adjusting to the campus environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Being obligated to repay loans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Anticipation of finding full-time professional work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. Meeting deadlines for course assignments 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Appendix I

The GHSQ (Wilson et al., 2005)
**Directions:** If you were having personal or emotional problems in graduate school, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people? Use the scale below to indicate your intention to seek help from each help source that is listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale: Extremely Unlikely</th>
<th>Extremely Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Partner/Spouse/Significant Other 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Friend (non-relative) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Parent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Other Relative (family member) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Mental Health Professional (psychologist, counselor) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Pastor/Priest/Religious Leader 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Medical Doctor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. Professor/Advisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Someone else not listed above 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Describe the person’s role:_________________________

10. I would not seek help from someone 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Appendix J

Supplemental Help-Seeking Questions
11. In 3 or 4 sentences, describe your thought process for seeking help from others when stressful situations occur.

12. In 3 or 4 sentences, what consequences do you think about when seeking help from others when stressful situations occur?

13. When needed, how often do you seek help from others?
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Seldom
   - Not at all
APPENDIX K

The ACSI (Utsey et al., 2000)
**Directions:** Briefly describe a stressful situation that occurred to you within the past week or so. Below, briefly describe that stressful situation in 3 to 4 sentences.

Now, using the scale below, please indicate the extent to which you used each of the coping behaviors listed below for the stressful situation that you just described above.

**Scale:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Prayed that things would work themselves out.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

2. Got a group of family or friends together to help with the problem.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

3. Shared my feelings with a friend or family member.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

4. Remembered what a parent (or other relative) once said about dealing with these kinds of situations.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

5. Tried to forget about the situation.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

6. Went to church (or other religious meeting) to get help from the group.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

7. Thought of all the struggles Black people have had to endure and this gave me strength to deal with the situation.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

8. To keep from thinking about the situation, you found other things to keep you busy.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

9. Sought advice about how to handle the situation from an older person in your family or community.
   - Did Not Use
   - Used A Little
   - Used A Lot
   - Used A Great Deal

10. Read a scripture from the Bible (or similar book) for comfort and/guidance.
    - Did Not Use
    - Used A Little
    - Used A Lot
    - Used A Great Deal
11. Asked for suggestions on how to deal with the situation during a meeting your organization or club.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

12. Tried to convince yourself that it was not that bad.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

13. Asked someone to pray for you.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

14. Spent more time than usual doing group activities.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

15. Hoped that things would get better with time.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

17. Spent more time than usual doing things with friends and family.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

18. Tried to remove yourself from the situation.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

19. Sought out people you thought would make you laugh.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

20. Got dressed up in my best clothing.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

21. Asked for blessings from a spiritual or religious person.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

22. Helped others with their problems.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

23. Lit a candle for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

24. Sought emotional support from family and friends.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3

25. Burned incense for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.
   Did Not Use   Used A Little   Used A Lot   Used A Great Deal
   0            1            2            3
26. Attended a social event (dance, party, movie) to reduce stress caused by the situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27. Sung a song to yourself to help reduce stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. Used a cross or other object for its special powers in dealing with the problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. Found yourself watching more comedy shows on television.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. Left matters in God’s hands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Use</th>
<th>Used A Little</th>
<th>Used A Lot</th>
<th>Used A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Cognitive Appraisal Items
Directions: Please take a moment to think back to the stressful situation that you described briefly on the previous page. Please rate the following questions based on each scale below.

1. How taxing did that stressful situation seem to your resources and your ability to cope?
   Not taxing at all
   Not successful
   Not changeable
   No Acceptance
   None needed
   No Holding Back
   No Control
   Not needed

2. How successful did you feel you were at coping when that stressful situation arose?
   Very Successful
   Completely Changeable
   Full Acceptance
   Lots Needed

3. To what extent did you think you could change or do something about that stressful situation?

4. To what extent did you think you had to accept that stressful situation?
   No Acceptance
   Holding Back
   No Holding Back

5. To what extent did you need to know more information before you could act on that stressful situation?
   Lots Needed
   None needed

6. To what extent did you have to hold yourself back from doing what you wanted to do about that stressful situation?
   Holding Back
   No Holding Back

7. To what extent did you think you had control over that stressful situation?
   Total Control
   No Control
   No Holding Back
Appendix M

Debriefing Page
Thank you for your time and participation in this study!

You have just completed a survey on Black graduate students’ experiences of stress, ways of thinking about stress, and ways of managing stress.

Your responses to the survey are anonymous. No information from this survey can be linked to your name or academic records.

You have been informed that there were no immediate personal benefits of completing this survey. You have been informed that the overall benefit of this study is the potential to add to the underrepresented literature of Black graduate students.

You have also been informed that minimal risks were associated with completing this survey. You have been informed that uncomfortable feelings may arise after recalling personal experiences. In the event that these feelings do arise, it may be beneficial to contact your university’s counseling center to speak with a counselor.

You have been informed about the opportunity to participate in a drawing as a means of compensation for participating in this study. You have also been informed of the ways in which the winners of the drawing are selected and contacted to receive their compensation.

You have been informed that participation in this study was voluntarily and that you had rights to withdraw from this study at any point with no penalties against you. You have also been informed that you have the right to request a summary of the results once the study has concluded and ways to requesting that information.

You have been informed that this study is being conducted under the direct supervision of Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. This study has been reviewed and approved by Western Michigan University’s Institutional Review Board (HSIRB Approval # 17-02-38). If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at (732) 236-6834 or shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at (269) 387-5113 or mary.anderson@wmich.edu.

You have been invited to pass the advertisement of this study, along with the link to this survey, to fellow graduate students who may meet the eligibility criteria and who may be interested in participating in the study. Please refer to the original email announcement to forward the attached flyer. You may also contact the student investigator, Shealyn Blanchard, at shealyn.j.blanchard@wmich.edu to request the information.
If you would like to enter into the drawing for an Amazon gift card, please click ENTER THE DRAWING! You will be redirected to a different page where you will enter your contact information. This information cannot be linked back to your survey responses.