Chapter 3
Perseverance:
The Dream Will Not Be Deferred

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ABSTRACT
This chapter addresses the author’s eight year journey to obtaining a Ph.D. at a large predominately White southern university. Through mentorship, compromise and giving into the system, the author learned the delicate balance between speaking up and using quiet strength. In addition to offering hope, this chapter addresses the familiar dilemma of doctoral students when faced with opposing committee members, approaching deadlines, and the infamous “clock”. The goal of this chapter is to empower women who are confronted with similar obstacles and emphasize the need for faculty mentors who look like and understand women of color. Although this chapter is filled with personal and professional trials, it will validate that determination will result in the realization of dreams.

INTRODUCTION

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?

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This chapter addresses my eight year journey as an African American woman coming from a Historical Black College and University (HBCU) background to obtaining my doctoral degree at a Predominately White Institution (PWI). It is a story intertwined with success and struggle; however, through mentorship, compromise and at one point, giving in, I learned the delicate balance between speaking up and using quiet strength. In addition to offering hope, my story addresses the familiar dilemma of doctoral students when faced with opposing committee members, approaching deadlines, and the infamous “clock”. My primary struggles throughout my doctoral program included being an advocate for my race and juggling a full-time job and family. While sharing my story, I hope to empower women who are confronted with similar obstacles and emphasize the need for faculty mentors who look like and understand women of color. Although this chapter is filled with personal and professional trials, it will validate that determination will result in the realization of dreams.

BACKGROUND

The difficulty of attaining higher education for women is not a new occurrence, but a rarely discussed phenomenon when it pertains to women of color (Aryan & Guzman, 2010; Patton & Harper, 2003). As highlighted by previous studies, females are prevalent in pursuing higher education; yet, the multi-faceted roles of employee, family member, and caregiver are often overlooked when women put forth the time and effort to attain a post baccalaureate degree. Along with these outside forces which affect schooling, women or color increasingly find themselves in new spaces and in places where they were formerly denied entry. Strong mentoring relationships are necessary for growth, survival, and program completion. Women of color face the compounded problem of not having mentors in graduate schools programs who look like and understand dilemmas faced by minority women (Aryan & Guzman, 2010; Patton & Harper, 2003). While women of color are often unsuccessful in locating mentors in their graduate level programs, mentors are often found outside academia in the form of friends, relatives, work supervisors, sorority sisters, and
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