

Interrupting the Usual: African-American Doctoral Students Experiencing Race at a
Predominantly White Institution

By

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ABSTRACT

While there is comprehensive research presented on university college climate and experiences of undergraduates that correlate with their success (Gay, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1994; Milem et al, 1998; Harper & Hurtado, 2007), the discourse that surrounds the success and achievement related to the experiences of graduate students, and doctoral students in particular, is limited to largely academic factors. Academics only explain part of graduate student success (Golde, 2000). This study seeks to address the gap in the current literature which fails to address the racialized experiences of African American doctoral students. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this study explores the narratives of nine African-American doctoral candidates to understand how from the perspective of race, graduate study is experienced at one predominantly white campus located in the Midwestern region of the United States. The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis reveals that the nine African American doctoral students are experiencing psychological warfare (the perpetuation of isolation, violence, fear and tokenism). The findings also indicated that African American graduate students developed an academic consciousness (that is, utilizing both double and triple consciousness; Dubois, 1903; Fanon, 1967) as a way to think about and navigate the psychological warfare they experienced. Lastly, the study found that participants developed tools for surviving their academic environments (e.g., developing and cultivating same-race relationships, self-imposed isolation, racial agency and self-discovery). This study provides us with ways to think about how the issues that impact graduate students (e.g., sense of belonging, self-efficacy, socialization and campus climate) and their implications transcend race and individual experiences (e.g., impact the academic labor force). The study concentrates on ways to disrupt the inherent cycles of violence that exist within academe so that university communities become more equitable,

welcoming, and transformative spaces for students of color and African-American graduate students in particular.

Introduction

Each week, as I walk into the School of Nursing prepared to teach my course, I am greeted by a White woman or man who says to me: “Can I help you?” Despite being there on a weekly basis, I am always perceived as a visitor in need of help. Though I assume that they are well-intentioned, their implicit assumption that I must not be a member of the community is a painful reminder that I am an outsider. Each time it happens, I think to myself, “Oh no, here it is again. Because there is only room for one African-American faculty member, and they know who that is, and there are only three Black Ph.D. students, and they know who those folks are...maybe. Because I am an unfamiliar African-American woman, I couldn’t possibly work at the School of Nursing.” Unfortunately, confronting such marginalizing experiences has shaped much of my educational career.

As an African-American¹ graduate student, I have seen the ways in which prejudice, racism, and discrimination have created divisions among people and resulted in hatred and animosity among members of the Black community. While completing my first and second master’s degrees at predominantly white institutions, I saw people of color treated with disdain and disrespect, and I, too, suffered from alienation and isolation. This created a deep conviction within me to work to understand the experiences of students of color, particularly African Americans, and make their experiences known to the wider scholarly community.

African-American doctoral students, as a population, have been understudied within higher education (Lewis, Ginsberg & Davies, 2004). As an African-American female doctoral student, I often wonder about the lives of other African-American doctoral students and how

¹The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably to refer to US born and/or raised people of African descent.

they experience life at predominantly white institutions. I also wonder if they, like me, have been regarded with incredulity within their institutions; or if they—due to their race—experience moments of anxiety, fear, sadness, uncertainty and/or failures while pursuing their doctoral degrees. I am especially curious about the racialized experiences of African-American doctoral students. I hope to contribute to the discourse around how African-American graduate students in predominantly white institutions are treated, and how they face adversity from a lens that gives voice to both the struggles and accomplishments of these students.

I do not intend to conduct this research to find a universal truth, because there are many ways to experience Blackness (i.e. possessing black skin, culturally identifying as Black, identifying politically as Black) at a predominantly white institution (Gray, 1995; Ogbu, 1991; Willis, 1995). I will, however, present my findings in such a way as to suggest strategies for moving the discourse forward around the ways that many African Americans experience graduate study. In doing so, institutions may understand the diverse experiences that these students have at primarily homogeneous universities, and use this new knowledge to evaluate how students are treated, develop institutionalized systems of support, and dismantle inequities within doctoral education. To that end, I pose the following research question: From the perspective of race, how are African-American doctoral students experiencing graduate school at predominantly white institutions?

Background to the Study

According to the US Department of Education (2010), two million graduate students are enrolled in 4,300 colleges and universities across the United States. Nearly 75% of graduate students are in pursuit of a master's degree, while 25% are aspiring to achieve a doctoral degree (Strayhorn, 2012). Yet, African Americans remain underrepresented at the Ph.D. level (Lewis et

al., 2004). In 1993, African Americans earned 4.2% of all doctorates in the United States (Ellis, 1997). In 2004, the number of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans reached 1,869—about 7% of overall degree recipients (SED, 2007). It remains unclear why there is such a small proportion of African Americans obtaining doctorates, particularly given the fact that there are larger numbers of African Americans receiving baccalaureate degrees than in years past (Lewis et al., 2004).

The existing literature on the academic persistence of African-American students who are in pursuit of higher education is limited, with most of it focused on the experiences generated by African-American undergraduates and not on African-American graduate students (e.g., Gasman et al., 2004; Johnson Bailey et al., 2008; Nettles, 1990; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The persistence literature on African-American undergraduates centers on their likelihood to graduate, strategies for successful graduation, and various components of the undergraduate experience that include academic and social integration (see Tinto, Bean & Eaton, Astin). Not only has the existing literature failed to address how people of color experience microaggressions in academic spaces, it does not examine the value of academic efficacy as a way to understand student success. Various scholars suggest that African-American students who experience alienation, isolation, and marginalization at the undergraduate level are likely to encounter these same experiences at the graduate level (Cuyjet, 2006; Gay, 2007; Hurtado & Harper, 2007).

While much of the limited literature on the experiences of African-American graduate students addresses microaggressions, what is often missing is the compound and complex nature of graduate study at various stages in which graduate students serve in dual capacities (student/teacher, mentor/mentee, student/researcher, student/employer, student/parent). Significantly, the self-exploratory nature of graduate study often lends itself to a particular period

of loneliness, especially after the completion of coursework and during the dissertation research data collection and writing phases of the process (Grover, 2007). The constant battle to persist is ever present when there are few accountability measures in place such as graded assignments and regular face-to-face contact with faculty. The following questions remain: How are graduate students navigating the graduate school process? How do graduate students live? How do graduate students approach difficult tasks? How do they manage loneliness? How are graduates students being socialized into in the academy? How do African-American graduate students experience doctoral study at predominantly white institutions that are often characterized as having unwelcoming environments? I will draw on these underexplored topics to guide the analysis in the study.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to address the gap in the current literature which fails to address the racialized experiences of African American doctoral students. This study premier African-American doctoral student narratives of how graduate study is experienced on predominantly white campuses. The explanations regarding doctoral persistence suggested by scholars cite enrollment patterns, incompatible faculty relationships and mentoring, lack of financial support, and family commitments as primary contributors to undermining persistence toward degree completion (Delaney, 2004; Ehrenberg et al, 2005; Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gay, 2007; King & Chepyator-Thompson, 1996; Lewis et al, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Schwartz, Bower & Rice, 2003). While there is comprehensive research presented on university college climate and experiences of undergraduates that correlate with their success (Gay, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1994; Milem et al, 1998; Harper & Hurtado, 2007), the discourse that surrounds the success and achievement related to the experiences of graduate

students, and doctoral students in particular, is limited to largely academic factors. Academics only explain part of graduate student success (Golde, 2000).

Other contributions to the literature have been geared toward professional identity development, peer relationships, community, and well-being (Boyle & Boyce, 1998; Gansemer-Topf et al., 2004; Hardré & Chen, 2005, 2006; Hardré & Hackett, 2015; Offstein et al., 2004; Strayhorn, 2012; Twale & Stein, 2000; Tenenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003). All of these factors are likely important when understanding the experiences of graduate students. Given the fact that African-American doctoral students make up such a small percentage of graduate students (Felder et al., 2014), and the decline in African Americans graduating from doctoral programs in education (Henfield, Owen, & Witherspoon, 2011; Felder et al., 2014; NSF, 2012), it is not difficult to predict that, unless something is done, the negative experiences that African-American doctoral students associate with being in the racial minority will continue to persist (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006; Nettles, 1990; Henfield et al., 2011).

Many non-academic variables such as isolation, alienation, and marginalization are also important (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gay, 2007; Lewis et al., 2004). In turn, research is needed to explore other psychosocial factors related to African-American doctoral student socialization, and other psychosocial constructs such as socialization, microaggressions, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging (Bandura, 1997; Pierce, 1995/1998; Strayhorn, 2012; Sue et al., 2008; Sue, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001) that may be influencing their lived experiences and may, in turn, impact their pursuit of careers in academia. These elements of the graduate student experience are scarcely evident in the research literature, except in the work of a small group of researchers (Clark, 1993; Felder et al., 2014; Gay, 2007; Johnson-Bailey et al. 2008; King & Chepyator-Thompson, 1996; Strayhorn, 2012). In summary, it is unclear

how the diverse elements of the graduate experience shape how African-American students are experiencing graduate study (Hardre & Hackett, 2015).

Students' perceptions of the graduate experience are largely shaped by the experiences they had as undergraduates. Their encounters with others in academia shape their overall satisfaction with their graduate experience and the quality of their educational work (Golde, 2000; Hadre & Hackett, 2015). These perceptions may also influence their level of academic investment, their approach to their academic work, and whether they complete their degrees or add to the attrition statistics (Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999; Lovitts, 2001). Psychosocial experiences may have major implications for graduate education and understanding the graduate experience overall.

There is a clear need to focus this work on the African-American graduate student population and to understand their lives while they are engaged in graduate work. Institutions can explore success factors relating to the academic persistence of African-American graduate students toward degree completion. They can also aid in the socialization process for African-American students by enacting programmatic policies that will positively shape the academic and developmental experiences of African-American graduate students' doctoral studies.

Definition of Terms

To provide consistency of interpretation throughout this proposal, the following terms are defined: African-American, microaggression, persistence, predominantly white institution, persistence, and success.

African-American. African-Americans, also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans, is an ethnic group of citizens or residents of the United States with total or partial ancestry from any of the native populations of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Black. Black is an umbrella term used to describe African American, Afro-Caribbean, and other people of African descent. In this study, Black is also used interchangeably to describe African Americans.

Predominantly White Institution. Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Persistence. Persistence is defined as students' ability to continue their education from one semester to the next (Tinto, 1987).

Literature Review

To identify studies on how African-American doctoral students experience graduate school, I looked in the ERIC, Wilson, JSTOR, Ebscohost, and ProQuest databases using the following key phrases: "African-American graduate student persistence"; "African-American, graduate student retention"; "African-American doctoral student experiences"; "Black PhD experiences"; "Black doctoral students and campus climate"; "Black graduate students and critical race theory"; "Black doctoral student socialization"; and "Black doctoral student sense of belonging." After narrowing the search results, I selected studies that examined graduate student success and the obstacles that the literature highlighted as thwarting the success of African-American students.

I included studies that specifically explored the graduate student experience, graduate students and racial climates, graduate student development, graduate students and their motivation, and graduate students and their self-efficacy at predominantly white institutions. Because of the wealth of literature that is present regarding the academic achievement and

persistence of undergraduate students, I limited my use of studies pertaining to experiences of African-American undergraduate students. I also limited the use of studies that discussed minority students' persistence to those that included self-efficacy at the undergraduate level, or discussions about African-American self-concept² or motivation.

I excluded literature on non-Black or non-African-American ethnic groups because I am curious about the success of African-American graduate students and the ways that they are experiencing graduate school. Also excluded were climate studies involving underrepresented populations, such as non-Black LGBTQA students or the racialized experiences of minority faculty. I did so because I was interested in the academic lives of African-American graduate students in general and did not want to parcel out experiences based upon intersecting identities unrelated to the graduate school experience.

This literature review groups studies into five domains: (1) African-American graduate student success, (Ballard & Cintron, 2011; Beeler, 1991; Brazziel & Brazziel, 1987; Dixon, & Rousseau, 2005; Fountain, 2012; Gloria, 2007; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles, 1990); (2) African-American doctoral socialization, (Laird et al., 2007; Miller & Irby, 1999; Owens & Witherspoon, 2011; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Weidman & Stein, 2003); (3) African-American doctoral students sense of belonging at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2012); (4) African-American students and self-efficacy (Longfield, Roma & Irwin, 2006; Uqdah et al., 2009) and (5) Racial microaggressions experienced on university campuses (Montoya, 2014; Smith et al., 2011; Williams, Allen, & Smith, 2007).

² Self-concept is the belief or mental image one has of oneself and one's strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, status, etc.; self-image.

I conducted this review of the experiences of African-American graduate students because I want to demonstrate that there is an existing gap in the literature relating to the socialization, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and microaggressions experiences of African Americans in graduate school and that these theories and concepts collectively influence persistence and success in a way that has yet to be fully explored. Existing literature discussing African-American graduate student persistence and success is limited, and explores primarily the undergraduate African-American experience. The four aforementioned concepts applied to understanding graduate students help to explain academic factors for success, environmental factors for success, and intrinsic factors for success or hindrance respectively. Taken together, they explain and incorporate perspectives and experiences involving race in a way that may be useful in exploring how African-American doctoral students, in particular, experience graduate school at predominantly white institutions.

African-American Graduate Student Success

Researchers agree that it is important to acknowledge and understand the successful habits of African-American doctoral students in order to create an environment that will increase their persistence within higher education (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Gay, 2007; Johnson-Bailey et.al, 2008). To that end, Ballard and Cintrón (2010) sought to identify the practices of five successful African-American male doctoral students that have attended and graduated from predominantly white institutions within five years from the initial date of the study. The authors' found that all of the participants had a mentor and made positive assertions regarding the significance of faculty support (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010).

Research suggests the importance of faculty and peer mentors in the graduate student process (Gasman, Hirschfeld & Vultaggio, 2008; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Johnson-Bailey et al.,

2008). Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) explored the support experiences of Black graduate students. Participants in this study reported that the single most important factor that helped them persist toward degree completion was the support of both Black students and Black faculty (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). Although White faculty served as a positive support system for Black students as well, it was not to the same degree as Black faculty. Moreover, Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) found that White students provided relatively little support for Black students. Those students who were the only Black people in their program or schools stated that they believed that their experience would have been enhanced by a larger representation of both Black professors and students.

Research suggests the importance of faculty and peer mentors to African-American students navigating the doctoral process (Grant & Simmons, 2008). In particular, Grant and Simmons (2008) conducted a study of two African-American women in the academy to explore the effectiveness of traditional mentoring at a predominantly white institution. Using the narratives of one African-American doctoral student who aspired to become a faculty member, and an African-American tenured professor, the study highlighted the difficulty that the doctoral student had distinguishing between “departmental politics and elite racism” (p.509). The doctoral student said that she struggled with disrupting White faculty in their occupation and preoccupation with their own research agendas and was in need of educational support, understanding, or *sistering*, which is the need to have personal and professional networking relationships with other women of color (p.509). Grant and Simmons (2008) cited successful strategies for mentoring, such as role-modeling and having same race and same gender professors assist junior academics. Because the role of faculty is to guide students in the successful completion of doctoral degrees, professors must begin to understand how their

influence not only contributes to the performance capabilities of African-American doctoral students, but also affects the way these students approach graduate study. This is a particularly significant point given that research has found that successful students had faculty mentors that were able to both effectively challenge and support their scholars (Nettles & Millet, 2006).

Recent studies have also highlighted the use of safe space among successful African-American graduate students (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010). Safe spaces among Black peer groups have been described as a support system for African-American students because, in these venues, students are provided with a mechanism to freely express opinions, are able to combat loneliness and isolation, and they are afforded the freedom to fail (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Gay, 2007; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles & Millet, 2006). To tackle feelings of isolation and discouragement, African-American graduate students often seek solace within these spaces amongst their peer groups (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Gay, 2007; Johnson-Bailey et. al., 2008). Peer groups have long been identified as an important component in the persistence of scholars, but for African-American graduate students in particular, identifying and engaging with other successful Black graduate students serves to motivate and encourage African-American them to do well academically (Nettles & Millett, 2006).

The pinnacle of success for African-American graduate students is the receipt of a doctoral degree (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles & Millet, 2006). According to researchers, this achievement is a demonstration of tenacity (Might, n.d.). Other commonalities that drive success among African-American graduate students include their ability to endure the doctoral process in the face of institutional barriers and obstacles that occur along the way (Ballard & Cintron, 2010). Successful students learn to navigate the political landscape of the institution by developing interpersonal relationships with faculty, staff, and

students (Ballard & Cintron, 2010). Black students who completed their degree programs in the absence of racial role models and external support systems are characterized as being self-determined and resilient (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008).

The lessons learned in the extant literature is that external factors influence the ways in which African-American doctoral students approach their graduate work, the way in which they may perceive themselves while attempting the work, and the confidence they may have to persist and succeed while in graduate study. Still missing from the literature is discussion around the ways in which environmental and external factors begin to influence African-American doctoral students' understanding of themselves personally and professionally within the context of their work, their level of engagement and with whom, and their understanding of the complex nature of their role and how their experiences while in pursuit of a doctorate fuel their desires to pursue a particular career path. Literature on socialization, sense of belonging, self-efficacy and microaggressions (discussed below) help us to understand the intricacies of their experiences.

Socialization

Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) present an understanding and a model for socialization that has been widely used and cited (Felder et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2012; Weidman & Stein, 2003) for understanding graduate student socialization into the academy. The four stages of socialization in graduate school as characterized by Weidman et al. (2001) are anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal, with central features of socialization leading to “increasingly more advanced knowledge acquisition, involvement in the culture of the academic program, especially with faculty through mentoring and supervision” (Weidman et al., 2001). This model was extended from an original framework on role acquisition for undergraduates developed by Thorton and Nardi (1975), which assumes that the stages are iterative and can be present at any time during the student process (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). Socialization is

important for understanding the subtleties of graduate school and is characterized in two ways: 1) as a process and 2) as connected, in the case of important components like knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement, to student identity and commitment (Stein, 1992; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Thorton & Nardi, 1975; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001)

Anticipatory stage. This is the stage in which graduate students begin to learn about behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of doctoral study, which includes perceptions prior to enrollment. Sheehy (1977) calls this the “merger of self” because their predetermined ideas about their program and field of study become amended based on the realities now being presented upon arrival into their program from observing the attitudes, behaviors, and interactions of faculty and students in their respective programs and at their institutions (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p.11). Students operating in this stage learn about the rules, department and university terminology, departmental norms, and acceptable behaviors (Staton, 1990; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Formal stage. After a student has been accepted into their program, they begin a process of determining whether they are good fit for their program or institution. Weidman et al. (2001) state that students practice “role rehearsal” (p.13), a process in which students begin not only to observe but also to imitate other students and become more seen and well-known in their programs. In this formal capacity, their role becomes romanticized. This is the stage in which newer students pay close attention to the movements and behaviors of more senior students and receive formal instruction by faculty. Students in this stage learn about the “hidden curriculum” which is more about receiving knowledge that is not readily available to the public about opportunities available and who provides them and why (Weidman et al., 2001). This is the stage in which students begin to establish professional goals for themselves. These goals become

modified and changed as they continue on their academic journey and through regular feedback from their faculty. This is also the stage in which students accept more responsibility, and, in turn, receive more privileges by serving on committees and volunteering their time for departments. Student concerns at this stage focus on the success of tackling difficult courses and exams. According to Buchner and Stellings (1977), the achievement of success for students in this stage rests heavily on “how clearly standards and expectations are stated” and understood (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p.13).

Informal stage. The informal stage of role acquisition is where a doctoral student learns about informal expectations for engaging with other doctoral students. Because they are beginning to understand which behaviors are deemed acceptable and which are not, peer support mechanisms are formed to discuss anxieties, fears, and umbrages about meeting expectations, fitting in, and achieving goals while carrying out the responsibilities of being a doctoral student. Having peer support is important for student connectedness (Twale & Kochan, 2000; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Students at this stage learn about shortcuts and ways to achieve their goals by making them specific, measurable, achievable, and time bound.

Personal stage. In the personal stage of socialization for doctoral students, the professional academic role becomes more internalized and a professional identity begins to take shape. Students discover the dissonance between their former self-image (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Gottlieb, 1961) and their newer professional image by subduing old habits and forging an independent path. Doctoral students begin to understand that their program only prepares them for their profession and they begin to operate more independently (Olmstead & Paget, 1969; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). Students begin to adopt more sophisticated expectations for themselves as they begin to secure competitive assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships.

Finally, doctoral students in this stage become more engaged in critical areas of specialty and are more involved with professional activities such as publications, and presentations. Students determine their marketability based on their participation in these professional activities and their networks, as well as their level of commitment both personally and professionally after graduation (Stark, Lowther, & Hagerty, 1986; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001).

While it is important to understand the stages of the socialization process (anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal), Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) settle on three core elements of socialization—knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement—that lead doctoral student to commit to their respective professions and to understand the graduate student process more fully.

Core Element 1: Knowledge Acquisition. Knowledge acquisition is important in the doctoral process for two reasons: First, beginning doctoral students have to gain knowledge and skills to effectively perform their role; second, the knowledge gained is associated with being in the role they are looking to perform, and they are assessing realistically if the role is achievable. Moreover, students are also building an awareness of others' (faculty and peers) perceptions of the individual's capacity to be successful in that role. While acquiring knowledge, the student begins to understand the issues that arise with the selected profession and their capacity to handle or withstand the professional culture (Stein, 1992; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001)

Core element 2: Investment. The second core value, investment, means to commit something of value such as your time, energy, finances, social standing and/or reputation to prepare for doctoral study. In each stage of socialization, the investment level increases as the field of study becomes more specialized (Stein, 1992; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001).

Core element 3: Involvement. The third core element of socialization is involvement as one begins to prepare for the professional role. In doctoral study, there are progression markers or rites of passage, such as exams, certifications, submission of a prospectus and a final oral defense to which students must devote hours of attention. Through the progression of these markers, students begin to demonstrate an interest in the primary issues in their field of study and participate in opportunities to demonstrate their expertise. It is through involvement that doctoral students begin to make sense of the intersections between their personal and professional roles (Oleson & Whittaker, 1968; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001)

Socialization within higher education is paramount while navigating the doctoral process because it allows for a novice scholar to become indoctrinated into the academic community via their institutions and departments (Felder, 2010). Socialization continues to shape the development of students, and involves their perceptions pre-arrival as well as their academic identity throughout (Golde, 1998; Felder, 2010). In a quantitative study that focused on the socialization of doctoral students in the academy, Weidman & Stein (2003) had 26 respondents from a department of sociology (a 65% return rate) and 24 respondents from an educational foundations department (a 56% return rate) out of 86 in total. Of the respondents, 66.7% had already earned advanced degrees (primarily the master's degree), and 35% were currently at the dissertation stage of study. All had completed at least one academic year of graduate study in their current department.

The findings in the Weidman and Stein study (2003) suggest that the socialization of doctoral students to their academic role is directly related to student perceptions of departmental faculty encouragement for students' participating in academic activities. These findings support claims (Thornton and Nardi, 1975; Weidman et al., 2001) that the climate of an academic

department positively contributes to the socialization of students. Faculty who are accessible to students, actively engaged in scholarly activities themselves, and who clearly convey expectations and encouragement for students engaging in such activities foster an orientation toward scholarship. These findings articulate a scholarship-oriented approach in which faculty treat students as future colleagues and remain available to students while also engaging with them in scholarly activities (Weidman & Stein, 2003).

Gardner (2007) sought to understand the social processes of 20 doctoral students in chemistry and history, and found that professional development was also a key component in their socialization. The study identifies four factors that either facilitated or impeded success: ambiguity around norms and guidelines, support from faculty and peers, balance between graduate school and outside commitments, and balance when transitioning from student to independent scholar (Gardner, 2007). Heavy workloads and living unbalanced lives were also a source of anxiety found in the 1999 Miller and Irby study. Miller and Irby (1999) found that a major source of anxiety for students were the substantial time requirements needed to complete tasks when balancing other student responsibilities. Because African-American doctoral students have many roles while in pursuit of graduate degrees, they often have to contend with a variety of demands to fulfill these roles. According to the literature, successfully socialized students are able to handle their academic work and manage external commitments as part of their graduate student experience.

Socialization and race have been explored jointly as a way of understanding the experiences of African-American doctoral students (Laird et al., 2007; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Taylor & Antony (2000) tackle race and stereotype threat in their qualitative study of 12 full-time African-American male and female doctoral students in education. The most notable

finding suggested that in areas in which the advisor was less than ideal or perhaps unsupportive, the doctoral student did not lose ambition to complete the degree but was more likely to avoid pursuing an academic career path (Taylor & Antony, 2000). Laird et al. cited a similar finding in their 2007 study of eight African-American women in doctoral programs. The demands of doctoral study suggested the need for a strong support system in an effort to combat the inevitable rollercoaster ride of stress, extreme workloads, and loneliness that is bound to occur once the coursework phase is completed (Hadjioannou, Shelton & Dhanarattigannon, 2007; Nyquist et al, 1999; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003).

To address the needs of African-American doctoral students, Hensfield, Owens and Witherspoon (2011) conducted a study of 11 African-American doctoral students in counseling programs and investigated their ability to exercise human agency when confronted with difficult experiences in graduate school. Hensfield et al. (2011) found that students exercised assertiveness to overcome barriers. The participants in the coursework phase of doctoral work in the Hensfield et al (2011) study turned to and gained knowledge from advanced doctoral students to get their academic needs met. The authors concluded that doctoral students who took more ownership over choices and decisions (i.e., using peers to aid them in their academics) appeared to be more self-confident (Hensfield et al., 2011).

Peers, peer pedagogy, and the belonging needs of African-American doctoral students are important factors that shape their experience of doctoral study. Peer pedagogy as a strategy for overcoming existing barriers is important in shaping the doctoral experience because Black peers learning from other Black peers serves multiple functions: 1) students who learn from other students increase their cultural capital; 2) peers teaching other peers (peer pedagogy) is an intentional strategy on the part of African-American students to retain their same race peers; 3)

African American doctoral students who learn from their more seasoned peers about unpublicized rules and strategies feel more connected to their departments and institutions. Peer pedagogy as a form of social justice is an area that needs to be explored more deeply when looking at the experiences of African-American doctoral students because same-race peers play a distinctive role in positively shaping experiences of African -American doctoral students.

In addition to examining the role of peers in the socialization process, the studies on socialization have included the role of faculty in the process of understanding the academic rules, norms and behaviors that aid in the socialization of doctoral students. The acquisition of knowledge as the roles and responsibilities of the doctoral student change from one phase to the next also has been studied, but requires further scrutiny, especially to uncover some of the nuances that occur as a result of navigating the doctoral process and experiencing microaggressions as an African-American student’.

While each of the studies presented in this review of literature have tackled race because the focus is on African Americans, racism in the socialization process is often unnamed and in its place, language is used to reflect “hidden norms and rules” that white students easily access at predominantly white institutions from white faculty. Race, when discussed in the socialization literature, reflects individualized barriers and successes rather than collective successes or institutionalized ways to combat structural inequity that continues to inhibit the development and socialization of African-American doctoral students and negatively impacts their overall experience.

Socialization literature lacks a discussion of the nuanced psychosocial experiences African-American doctoral students often have while navigating the doctoral process. This study seeks to address the nuanced racialized experiences had by African-American doctoral students

involving microaggressions and other types of impediments to socialization. When these concepts are discussed and intersected with race, additional nuances shaping the experiences of African-American doctoral students may be found in models of academic disciplines such as cohort or apprentice. Moreover, qualitative studies of doctoral students who are involved in graduate study do not fully address key components that add to the marginalization experience for African Americans as these doctoral students are under pressure to be politically sensitive to the organizational dynamics of their programs (Felder, 2010; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Thompson, 2006). Therefore, a holistic study of the psychosocial experiences of African-American doctoral students is needed to address some of the internal processes that shape their experiences and socialization.

Sense of Belonging

Literature on sense of belonging is important for understanding how doctoral students experience graduate school at predominantly white institutions because students who succeed academically are often noted in a variety of disciplines and fields as feeling connected to other individuals and groups. Definitions and tools for measuring sense of belonging are not always available, or consistent. For example, Lee and Robbins (1995) described belongingness, or absence of belonging, as one's sense of social connectedness. Sense of belonging, or belongingness, is identified as a key psychological factor in a person's ability to grow and participate in the greater society (Maslow, 1943). Until most recently, sense of belonging was not directly assessed so that its independent effects on persistence could be measured (Haggerty & Patusky, 1995; Hausmann, Scholfield, Wood, 2007; Johnson et. al, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). The *sense of belonging and identification* involves the sentiment, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, system or

environment, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group (McMillian & Chavis, 1986 p. 5). Representative statements made to signify ownership would be for example: “my group”, “I am a member of this group.” Sense of belonging has been articulated in a number of ways in literature and has been examined in mental health, education, and sociology and the environment research (Baker & Baker, 1987; Goodenow, 1993; Hagerty, 1997; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Kohut, 1984; Lee & Robbins, 1995; 1995; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012; Tovar & Simon, 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Wolf, 1988).

Drawing on the psychology literature (Baker & Baker, 1987; Kohut, 1984; Wolf, 1988), Lee and Robbins (1995) suggest that early in life individuals articulate and fulfill their need for belonging through identification and involvement with the social world. These social interactions are gradually organized into cognitive representations of the self-in-relation-to-other (Hagerty, 1997). *Social connectedness* reveals that this internal sense of belonging is characterized as the subjective awareness of being in close relationship with the social world (Hagerty, 1997). The experience of interpersonal closeness in the social world includes relationships with family, friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers, community, and society. The aggregate of all these social experiences is gradually internalized by the individual, and serves as the foundation for a sense of connectedness.

In the field of education, Osterman (2000) states that sense of belonging is a feeling of commitment that individuals have toward each other and to a group. Meanwhile, Goodenow (1993) suggests that sense of belonging is being valued and encouraged by others in a classroom setting, and students feeling as though they are an important part of the class. Tovar and Simon (2010) characterize sense of belonging as positioning oneself in relationship to a university community, while Strayhorn (2012) describes sense of belonging as the “gratification of

physiological needs... such as a need to belong...which drives student behaviors and perceptions” (p.24).

All of these definitions suggest that individuals tend to depend on others and in so doing, sense of belonging “reflects the extent to which students feel connected” (Strayhorn, 2008 p. 505 cited in Strayhorn, 2012). While sense of belonging is a complex phenomenon and is unique to each individual (Hagerty, 1997), it increasingly becomes significant especially in spaces where students feel unwelcomed, marginalized, isolated, alienated, and alone (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging becomes increasingly important for students who may suffer from gender misalignment in a largely cisgender environment, low-income students in a highly selective environment, or for students of color in an extremely white environment (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of belonging has also been cited as a key component in student achievement, success, and persistence (Hagerty, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008) as it has been likened to the idea of social integration. The discourse that surrounds sense of belonging and student experiences in higher education have historically centered around undergraduate students and their success (Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Mallet et al, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007). In fact, in Strayhorn’s (2012) anthology entitled “College Students’ Sense of Belonging a Key to Educational Success for all Students,” seven core elements of sense of belonging are identified:

1. *It is a basic human need* (Maslow, 1962) Students cannot be successful until they feel connected to the university community.
2. *Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior.* Belonging needs move people to action (i.e. join clubs, writing groups, etc.).
3. *Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts and at certain times.*
4. *Sense of belonging is related to and seemingly a consequence of mattering.* Mattering is described as getting noticed, feeling cared for, feeling needed, feeling respected,

- believing that others share in our achievements (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1985). Beyond being polite and kind, one must feel that others care in order to feel as though they belong.
5. *Social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging.* To understand students' experiences, identity salience and social contexts exert influence on these considerations because social identities intersect and then simultaneously affect college students' sense of belonging. (p. 22)
 6. *Sense of belonging engenders positive outcomes.* Students' levels of engagement patterns, achievement and other pro-social behaviors are linked to success. (p. 22)
 7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change (p.23). Over time, and through various experiences, students' sense of belonging of personal acceptance or having a rightful valued place in a particular social context tends to stabilize and consistently influence their commitments and behaviors.

The core elements described above are important to understanding the fabric of belonging for graduate students because those in doctoral study are found to perform better when they have felt cared for and care about others that are invested in their academic success (Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011). Strayhorn (2012) attempts to successfully link socialization and sense of belonging with the graduate student experience. In his chapter on graduate students, he presents three major findings. First, graduate student socialization occurs through orientation programs, research opportunities, attending conferences, faculty advising and attending social gatherings with faculty and peers. Second, proper socialization develops a sense of belonging and encourages success within these programs, which leads to a sense of satisfaction. Third, a sense of belonging facilitates success, which is reflected in GPA.

Strayhorn's (2012) first two points are also cited in the socialization literature (Grover, 2007); however, it is in his third point concerning GPA that I found some contention. First, coursework is only the initial part of graduate work; therefore, attaining a high GPA and earning a grade above a B does not serve as an appropriate indication of belonging at the doctoral level. While GPA has long been measured as an indication of success (see Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005; Quaye & Harper, 2008; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003), doctoral study occurs in phases. There are no grades for the advanced stages of doctoral work. Grades are only earned when a student is engaged in the coursework phase of study. Beyond coursework is the dissertation proposal and dissertation defense stages, and it is in these stages of study that students often cite feelings of loneliness because they do not understand the dissertation proposal process, and have not selected faculty that are supportive of their intended research projects (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, 2004; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Attaining high GPAs account for very little in the advanced stages of work, the overall socialization process for students, do very little to inform career objectives.

Another way of connecting belonging needs and socialization is to suggest that experiences have the potential to inform career goals (Ostrove, Stewart & Curtin, 2011; Salle, 2007). There are other reasons, related to the nature of academia itself, that also help us to determine why a sense of belonging might matter so much for graduate students' socialization, self-efficacy, and future career goals, impacting the ways in which they experience graduate study more broadly (Ostrove, Stewart & Curtin, 2011). The academy is a highly individualistic institution (Trow, 1992), focused almost entirely—at least traditionally—on individual achievement and intellectual ability (Ostrove et al, 2011). A feeling of not belonging under those circumstances would make for understandable challenges in developing, or maintaining, a strong sense of academic and intellectual efficacy. It is this sense of self as academically competent and accomplished that, in turn, makes a future career as a member of faculty at a research university look attractive (Ostrove et al., 2011).

Self-Efficacy in African-American Doctoral Student Success

Self-efficacy theory sheds light on psychosocial factors perceived to be associated with doctoral student success, and thus will help in illuminating African-American doctoral experiences. I draw from Bandura's work to explicate my understanding of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) outlined four components of self-efficacy that individuals use to judge their efficacy: performance outcomes (performance accomplishments), vicarious experiences (observations of others), verbal persuasion (evaluative feedback), and physiological feedback (emotional arousal). These components help individuals to determine if they believe they have the capability to accomplish specific tasks. Self-efficacy helps individuals to figure out how much effort they will spend on an activity, how long they will carry on when experiencing challenges, and how resilient they will appear when confronting unfavorable situations (Bandura, 1986). People with low degrees of self-efficacy tend to think that tasks seem harder than they actually are (van Dinther, Dochy & Segers, 2011) and will avoid tasks altogether; whereas people with high degrees of self-efficacy, approach obstacles as challenges to be overcome (Bandura, 1997). Performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological responses are the centralized components of self-efficacy and their explanations are useful in understanding how students experience the doctoral process.

Performance outcomes. Performance outcomes are the first of the four components that are described in self-efficacy. Positive and negative experiences can influence the ability of an individual to perform a given assignment. If one has performed well at a previous assignment, he or she is more likely to feel capable to perform well at a similarly associated assignment (Bandura, 1977). For example, if one performed well in a literature class, they are more likely to feel confident and have high self-efficacy in another literature class. The individual's self-

efficacy will be high in that given area, and since he or she has a high self-efficacy, he or she is more likely to make an effort and finish the task with much better results. The opposite is also true. If an individual experiences failure, self-efficacy is likely to reduce. However, if the individual rises above the failure and persists later, it can serve to increase self-motivated persistence when a situation is viewed as an obstacle they can overcome (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2003).

The mastery of experiences or performance outcomes can lead to authentic successes in dealing with particular situations (Bandura, 1997). A mastery experience is the most powerful source for creating a strong sense of efficacy because it provides students with authentic evidence that they have the capability to succeed at a task (Palmer, 2006). Students interpret the results of their activities and use these interpretations to develop beliefs about their capability to perform subsequent tasks or activities. These interpreted results of one's own performances create a sense of self-efficacy. In general, successes build a strong sense of self-efficacy and failures lower it, especially when failures occur before a healthy sense of efficacy is developed (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious experiences. People can develop high or low self-efficacy by observing other people's performances. An individual can watch another individual and then compare his or her experience with the other's experience (Bandura, 1977; Pajares 1997). If a person sees someone similar to them succeed, it can increase their self-efficacy. However, the reverse is also true: seeing someone fail can lower self-efficacy. An example of how vicarious experiences can increase self-efficacy in academia is through mentoring programs, where pairing an individual with a professor with similar interests and intended career path can be successful at raising the individual's self-efficacy attitudes (Komarraju, 2010), or where exposing individuals to the

successes, in a required course, of students that they regard as equal to themselves may lead them to believe that they will also do well in the course (Cokley & Chapman, 2008). Attempts to increase self-efficacy through observational experiences can easily be enfeebled by following failures (Schunk, 1989a).

Verbal persuasion. Social persuasion is the third source that helps students develop beliefs of self-efficacy. According to Redmond (2010), self-efficacy is also influenced by encouragement and discouragement pertaining to an individual's performance or ability to perform, such as a professor telling a student, "You are a great writer. I believe in you." On the one hand, using verbal persuasion in an optimistic way leads individuals to put forth more effort; therefore, they have a greater chance at succeeding. On the other hand, if the verbal persuasion is negative, such as a professor saying to a student, "This is unacceptable! You are a terrible writer," it can cause the student to doubt themselves and their writing (Pajares, 1997). In addition, the level of credibility of the person delivering the information directly influences the ability to persuade (Bandura, 1997). If the individual has more credibility, it is more likely that there will be a greater influence. In the example above, a pep talk by an associate or full professor who has an established, respectable resume would have a stronger influence than that of a newly hired lecturer or adjunct. Although verbal persuasion is also likely to be a weaker source of self-efficacy beliefs than performance outcomes, it is widely used because of its ease and ready availability (Redmond, 2010). Persuasive communication and evaluative feedback are most effective when students view the people who provide this information as knowledgeable and reliable, and when they perceive the information as realistic (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Positive persuasive feedback heightens self-efficacy, but verbal persuasion alone is limited in its power to create a strong and abiding sense of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991).

Physiological feedback. The fourth source of efficacy information that people draw from is their physiological and emotional mood responses. Individuals experience sensations from their body and how they perceive these emotional arousals influences their beliefs of efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Some examples of physiological feedback are: giving a speech in front of a large group of people, making a presentation to an important client, and taking an exam. All of these tasks can cause agitation, anxiety, sweaty palms, and/or a racing heart (Redmond, 2010). Although this source is the least influential of the four, it is widely acknowledged that if one is more at ease with the activity at hand they will feel more capable and have higher beliefs of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy also helps individuals figure out how much effort they will expend on an activity, how long they will carry on when experiencing challenges, and how resilient they will appear when confronting unfavorable situations (Bandura, 1986). People with low degrees of self-efficacy tend to think that tasks seem harder than they actually are (vanDinther, Dochy and Segers, 2011). On the other hand, people with a high degree of self-efficacy approach challenges much differently. For example, there are assignments (i.e., coursework, exams, and presentations) that are present in doctoral work. Graduate students with a high degree of self-efficacy have usually successfully executed coursework, exams, and presentations in the past either during their undergraduate or master's level work. Therefore, when considering the aforementioned assignments, doctoral students would regard the assigned work as just another task to be completed rather than as a monumental task that should be avoided (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Bandura (1997) says that individuals with higher degrees of efficacy approach difficult situations more calmly. This means that physiological responses, such as butterflies in the stomach before an oral presentation or exam, is less likely to occur because the higher the

self-efficacy the lower the emotional arousal (Bandura, 1982). Bandura (1997) continues to use these arguments to imply that self-efficacy is an important characteristic of human agency.

Researchers who explore the influence of thoughts and beliefs on human behavior use socially constructed words like self-esteem and self-concept (vanDinther, Dochy, and Segers, 2011). Although they are different constructs, self-esteem and self-concept are often conflated with self-efficacy. Self-esteem involves judgments of self-worth and differs from self-efficacy because it is an emotional reaction signifying how people feel about themselves. Self-efficacy, more pointedly, includes internal opinions about one's own capacity to complete something (Zimmerman and Cleary, 2006; vanDinther, Dochy, and Segers, 2011).

To obtain a doctorate, one must prove not only to be resilient, but also to demonstrate human agency (vanDinther, Dochy, and Segers, 2011). The choices and decisions made by doctoral students to persist through the graduate process becomes increasingly important to understand because much of the literature that exists focuses on the production of baccalaureates and often includes the experiences and behaviors that shape the decisions to pursue graduate study (see Allen, 1992; cited in Morehouse and Dawkins, 2006). Few studies have explored the self-efficacy of doctoral students and its importance in understanding how an individual's approach to difficult tasks can influence how they perceive themselves in their many roles while in pursuit of study. Thus, very few researchers have tried to understand the psychosocial factors that lead to the retention and success of doctoral students.

It is important to understand these psychological factors because they can provide insight on how African-American doctoral students academically succeed and persist in academia. Researchers report that elements of success consist of psychosocial factors and systems of self-support, which include having a positive self-concept or demonstrating a high degree of self-

determination or resilience, and can aid students in the successful pursuit of degree completion (Cokely, 2003; Cokely & Chapman, 2008). They also discuss strategies to help build resilience through internalized motivators (Marrah, 2012; Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009).

A study exploring the psychological wellness of 75 Black graduate students in psychology, Uqdah et al. (2009) explored the relationship between academic self-concept, perceptions of anxiety, motivation, and depression among students. The graduate students in doctoral psychology programs were recruited from professional psychology schools, historically black colleges and universities, and predominantly white institutions. The findings suggested that, although the relationship between reported academic self-concept and anxiety scores was not statistically noteworthy, a connection did appear concerning the relationship between academic self-concept and depression. The students with reported higher academic self-concept scores had lower depression scores.

Previous studies have revealed a struggle with depressive feelings in graduate students (Longfield, Romas, & Irwin, 2006). In a 2006 qualitative study by Longfield, Romas, and Irwin (as cited in Uqdah et al., 2009), “graduate students noted an ‘elation/depression’ cycle in which they fluctuate between feeling ‘powerful and competent’ and ‘frustrated and disheartened ... one day you think you can do everything... then the next day when you hit the valley...you want to cry’ (p. 287). This study shows that the actions that stem from physiological factors could result in academic departure (Longfield, Roma & Irwin, 2006).

Components of self-efficacy include physiological responses (e.g. emotions and mood) and could help to explain how and why doctoral student persistence incorporates dichotomies of elation/depression, and feelings of powerfulness/powerlessness. There is little quantitative evidence highlighting the personal/psychological and interpersonal/social factors linked to

academic success and psychological well-being for African-American graduate students in doctoral programs (Gay, 2007; Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009). Though studies provide some information about the graduate experience in general, to date, little data has been made available to provide a clear understanding of the status of Black graduate students' psychological well-being, namely reports of anxiety and depression (Gasman, et al., 2008; Gasman, et al., 2004).

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are intentional and unintentional verbal and behavioral insults that communicate derogatory and often hostile racialized slights aimed at a person or group through human and environmental encounters (Gordon & Johnson, 2003; Sue, 2003; Sue et al. 2008, 2010). Pierce (1970) suggests that it is these subtle and understated acts of racism that need to be further examined today (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2006). Sue et al. (2008) created a taxonomy to discuss the three forms of microaggressions: (1) microassaults, (2) microinsults, and (3) microinvalidations.

Microassault. A microassault is described as a purposeful interaction meant to attack the intended via discriminatory behavior, name calling, or avoidant behavior. This would include racial epithets, slurs, and anything that would be considered a deliberate and intentional act of racism. Microassaults can be expressed in ways that allow the assailant to remain somewhat anonymous. Examples of this would be to ignore people of color and not serve them in places of business.

Microinsult. Microinsults are much more subtle than microassaults. They can be characterized as verbal, nonverbal, or environmental actions that express racial insensitivity or rudeness that can humiliate or degrade a person's racial and ethnic background. Microinsults are demonstrated in the form of snubs and implicit racial bias of which the wrongdoer is not usually aware (Banaji, 2001; DeVos & Banaji, 2005). Examples that often occur for people of color in

higher education include having their professional qualification minimized by being asked if they received their degrees from being in jail, or mistaking graduate of color students for janitorial staff (Montoya, 2014).

Microinvalidation. Microinvalidations are actions that undermine the psychological feelings and experiences of people of color. Examples of microinvalidations of people of color include saying to a person “You speak so well” or “There is no such thing as race” to invalidate the experiences or racial discrimination based on a structured racialized system. Phrases such as this communicate not only a message of tokenism, but also that people of color as a whole are unintelligent (Sue et al., 2007; Ford, 2014). Scholars have also discussed multiple examples of subtle forms of racism, discrimination and implicit bias toward people of color in higher education that would also invalidate their experience in the form of racial mocking (eye rolling, sighing, or laughing) on the part of white people when people of color challenge their implicit bias (Ford, 2014; Franklin, 2004; Harper, forthcoming; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al. 2007). Sue and company (2007) found that the assigning degrees of intelligence based on race and pathologizing communication styles are themes that often persist throughout microaggressions literature.

Racial microaggressions have an increasingly harmful effect on people of color because they attack their psychological well-being and invalidate them as racial and cultural entities (Franklin, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007; Smith, 2012). Much of the literature describing microaggressions in higher education are embedded within campus climate literature, as students provide examples in which institutions are hostile and are perceived as unwelcoming (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 1994; Ehrenberg, 2005; Gay, 2004; Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). However, emerging literature depicts the stress that

microaggressions have on people of color, especially Black people. In fact, Williams, Allen, & Smith (2007) conducted focus groups examining the experiences of 36 African-American males enrolled in top-tier, research intensive, predominantly white institutions in the United States. The participants reported experiencing microaggressions in the classroom environment, at social engagements on campus, and in the larger community within public spaces. The African-American males experienced an extreme form of misandry, which perpetuated stereotypes and feelings of alienation. The African-American males reported experiencing hypervisibility and felt victim to increased surveillance on and off campus by the local police. Whether it was on campus, in the local community, or in the classroom, respondents indicated that they were treated as illegitimate members of the university and local community. The authors found that the psychological responses to the microaggressions experienced (frustration, anger, resentment, shock, fear, helplessness, and hopelessness) are indicators of racial battle fatigue.

Racial battle fatigue is a conceptual framework that takes into consideration the psychological (disappointment, resentment, surprise), and physiological (i.e. insomnia, headache), and behavioral (social withdrawal, self-doubt) responses to battling microaggressions. Other studies involving the experience of Black males dealing with racial microaggressions were conducted by Smith, Hung, & Franklin (2011). The purpose of their study was to address the role microaggressions, societal programs, and academic achievement have in forecasting extreme environmental stress. After surveying 661 males, the authors concluded that the closer Black males are to graduating from college, the more racial microaggressions and societal issues contribute to their stress. Additionally, the authors concluded that predominantly white institutions are ripe for producing racial battle fatigue as a result of microaggressions (Smith et al., 2011).

The subject of microaggressions is important to discuss within the realm of higher education because it lends itself as lens to which we can understand the common and daily assaults on the personhood of people of color, while also recognizing the burdensome and tiring toll that being invalidated and discriminated against has on the lives of African Americans within higher education. Microaggressions intensify students' difficulty completing their degrees as these group of students have limited "space, time, energy, or counter-strategies to cope and resist" (Dressier, Bindon, & Neggers, 1998; Harper, 2009; Jackson, 2008; James, Hartnett, & Kaisbeek, 1983; James, LaCroix, Kleinbaum, & Strogatz, 1984; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Thus, the significance of microaggressions for African-American undergraduates is transferrable to doctoral students as it has the potential to shape their entire graduate student experience. Chester Pierce (1988, 1995) cautions academics about having a singular focus on the conditions that severely impact the experience of African Americans and further suggests that African Americans suffer added stressors as a result of perceived or actual racism occurring in school. This is compounded by ever present psychosocial responses to the trauma experienced as a result of the racism experienced at predominantly white institutions because Black doctoral students spend mental energy considering whether they are genuinely accepted or just being tolerated (Smith et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2007).

In an auto-ethnography, one doctoral student attending a predominantly white university described his lived experiences being invalidated while being enrolled in a teacher education program (Montoya, 2014). He cited instances of invalidation, including a professor asking a security guard to escort him to his advisor's office to ensure "safety," being asked if he was janitorial staff rather than a student, and being asked if he just came from court the day wore a suit to class (Montoya, 2014). These types of microaggressions become just as commonplace as

the racist jokes he and others were asked to ignore in order to ease the tension in meetings and when they are challenged as being overly sensitive or playing “the proverbial race card” (Montoya, 2014). The doctoral student’s experience with microaggressions in his predominantly white university is consistent with reports from other scholars who have noted similar experiences in their research (Martin, 2015; Fasching-Varner et al., 2015).

Black female doctoral students have also documented their experiences with microaggressions. These students have written personal narratives about their experiences dealing with microaggressions at predominantly white universities. In these narratives, the students recall their intellect and expertise being complimented by faculty and colleagues around the depth and breadth of their knowledge of subject matter in academic spaces (Martin, 2015; Fasching-Varner et al., 2015).

Microgressions often permeate a doctoral student’s sense of belonging, their socialization into the academy, and their self-efficacy because daily manifestations of racism and racial discrimination influence the way that they experience others by inciting mistrust, fueling a loss of self-confidence, increasing anger and indignation, and increasing stress and other psychological issues (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Thompson & Neville, 1999). African Americans experience more or less race-related stress contingent on their academic and social environment. (Pierce, 1995). Studies have shown that microaggressions in the form of university politics have also “resulted in delays, setbacks, and feelings of discouragement among participants,” (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010, p.20). The setbacks that have been identified are a result of not responding to the dissertation committee feedback, not understanding the dissertation proposal process, and not selecting faculty that are supportive of the research project (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

Microaggressions play a role in the doctoral students' professional development, professional identity, and the degree to which they engage in scholarly activities, which often depends on the academic and social environment (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010). As outlined in the current literature, socialization, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and microaggressions are discussed as separate psychosocial approaches for understanding the experiences of African-American doctoral students. Because each of these particular aspects of the doctoral experience address the multiple roles and identities that pertain to graduate level work, it is important to understand the interplay of each of elements as they are significant factors in understanding the lived experiences of African-American doctoral students at predominantly white institutions.

Racialized Model of Black Doctoral Experience

Given the lack of research in this field, and my intention to consider race within the elements of socialization, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy, I have developed the Racialized Model of Black Doctoral Experience as a framework to guide my analysis in the study. This model highlights the role of race within the following components:

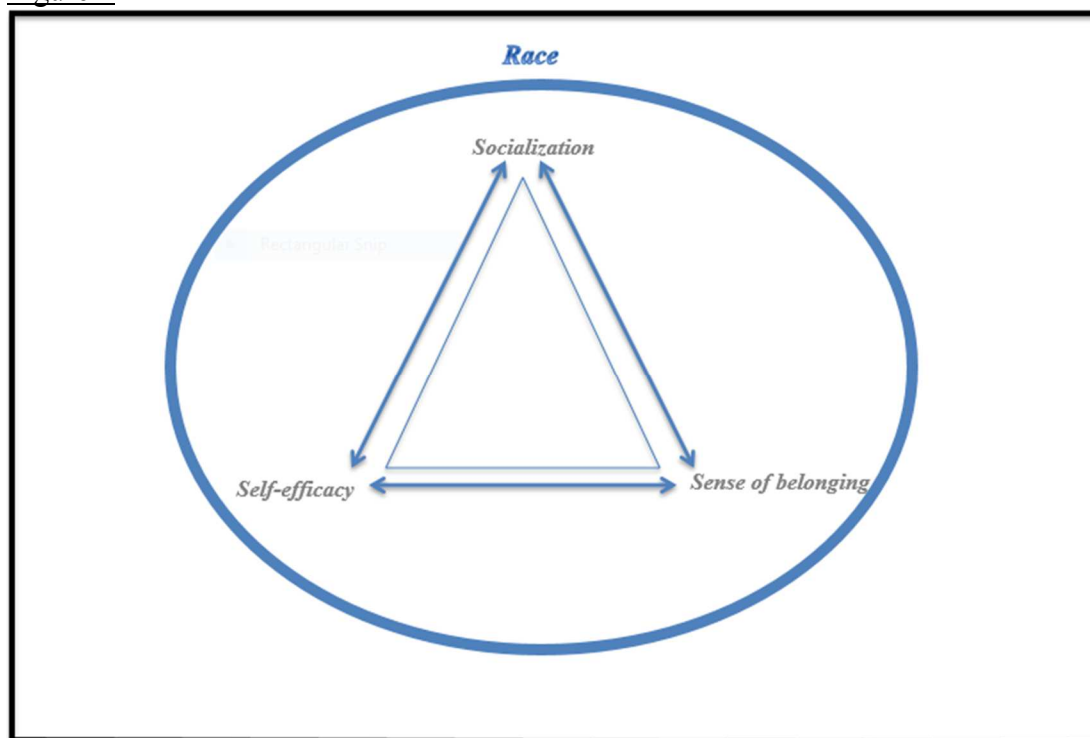
1. Socialization, which discusses the process of engagement throughout the doctoral process and a graduate student's transition from novice to expert.
2. Sense of belonging, which is characterized as a graduate student's sense of "mattering" to others and having their success deemed important to individuals within the academic sphere or a group.
3. Self-efficacy, which is described as a student's belief in their own ability to complete a task and is informed by their observations of others completing similar tasks, their mastery of the task in which they are destined to complete, the verbal opinions of those that they respect persuading them that they can or cannot complete the assigned task,

and their physiological response to the assigned task.

As described in the literature, the academic and professional socialization of doctoral students is important for indoctrinating scholars into their chosen field. Students and their sense of belongingness influence their successful socialization. A student's successful socialization also influences their belonging. Doctoral students' self-efficacy also influences their successful socialization, as their approach to difficult tasks is influenced by their belonging needs and their self-efficacy. Each one of these domains—socialization, sense of belonging and self-efficacy—shape doctoral experiences and the model depicts a two-way relationship between each domain. Taken together, these lenses offer a more holistic understanding of racialized daily encounters that African-American doctoral students weather while navigating the academy at predominantly white institutions. See figure 1 below.

Racialized Model of Black Doctoral Experience

Figure 1



Research Question

From the prospective of race: how are African-American doctoral students experiencing graduate study at a predominantly white institution?

Methodology

The voices and marginalized experiences of African-American doctoral students have been underexplored in higher education and, because of this; I am using a qualitative approach as the basis for this study because qualitative approaches have the ability to capture the racial experiences of African American doctoral students by seeking to understand and make meaning of rich subjective data and by interpreting the data within context (Creswell, 2012). In this section, I will identify the methods I will use to address the research question. First, I will explain phenomenology. Then, I will present hermeneutic phenomenology as my chosen methodological practice. This will be followed by a description of the study participants, procedures, instrumentation, and methods of analysis. I will then discuss trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined as the study of phenomena, its essence and meaning within a particular context (Finlay, 2009). It is an umbrella term used to explore the human experience and is also conceptualized as a way in which researchers focus on people's lived experience (Kafle, 2013). It is both an epistemological stance and practice of conducting research because of its philosophical approach and prescribed steps for data collection and analysis (Giorgi, 1997; Groenewald, 2004). German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is most widely credited for its use as an epistemological approach (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl believed that in order to study what was happening in the world, researchers had to strip the layers of the external world

and *get to the essence of things* (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology did not become established as an alternative to the scientific method, and a credible way of collecting data, until the 1970's when a descriptive method of data collection was created (Giorgi, 1997; Groenewald, 2004).

Phenomenological research is qualitative and examines experiences and perceptions from a first person perspective (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Smith, 2013). According to Welman and Kruger (1999) "phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (cited in Groenewald, 2004, p.5). It focuses on the essences of experiences either through an existential or an interpretive frame (Kafle, 2013). There are three approaches to conducting phenomenological research: transcendental (suspending one's opinion to find the essence of truth), existential (focus of human existence), and hermeneutic (researcher positionality in conversation with interpreting and understanding lived experiences through text), and this approach is concerned with pre-reflective experiences and feelings ideal for investigating academic learning journeys (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Hammersley, 2000; Kafle, 2013).

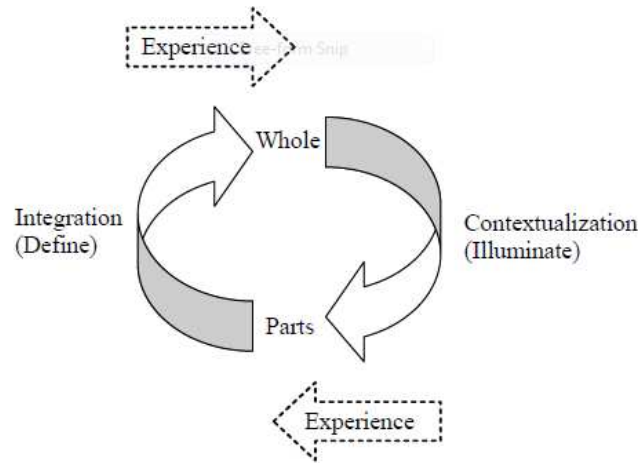
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

I have chosen hermeneutic phenomenology as the method for this study because it rejects the idea of suspending personal opinion or researcher bias in favor of recognizing that both researcher and subject are subjective and contextual (Kafle, 2013). As a subset of phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology serves as an epistemological stance and research praxis (Kafle, 2013) because its purpose is to unlock meanings "which are not immediately manifest to our intuiting, analyzing, and describing" (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 712). As an approach that seeks to understand and interpret everyday experiences of people, it is important to discover the meaning of people's experiences that may not be obvious. This latter point has been

highlighted by notable scholars such as Martin Heidegger (student of Husserl), Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Max van Manen, all of whom are the theorists in which most hermeneutic phenomenology is based (Kafle, 2013). The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to uncover and understand how someone is experiencing the world through story-telling (van Manen, 1997; Welman, Krugar, 1999) which gives meaning to the perceptions and experiences of the subjects being studied and provide a descriptive analysis for their lived experiences (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998; van Manen, 1990). Descriptions and interpretations are an iterative process throughout this epistemological approach and method.

Embedded in this research will be the use of the hermeneutic circle which serves as a representation for understanding and interpreting the phenomena of how African-American doctoral students experience graduate study at a predominantly white institution. Each component of the circle provides a circular and iterative meaning such that the information flows between the parts (see Figure 2). Therefore, I will remain open to questions that arise from studying the phenomenon and allow the text to communicate. The answers that I find will then be located in the text. In this context, the text is constructed by the researcher and is drawn from the data collected from participants. Understanding comes from the process of engagement between the researcher and the research (Bontekoe, 1996). The act of interpretation itself represents an ongoing coming together of awareness on the part of the researcher and the text (Bontekoe, 1996).

Figure 2. *The basic form of the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, 1996, p. 4).*



Hermeneutic phenomenology purports that researchers bring their biases and subjectivity to the research. Accordingly, researcher prejudices and assumptions influence the ways in which questions are asked, the information relayed in the findings, and the ways in which the data is analyzed (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). Many of the components that shape our presence in the world require interpretation to be understood; therefore, it is important that we highlight our preconceived ideas (Spiegelberg, 1982; Wilke, 2006). Because we experience and comprehend the world by means of projection and bias, our interpretations (Odman, 1988; Wilcke, 2002), understanding, and experiences are inextricably linked (Wilcke, 2002). Thus, it will be especially important to take into account my own personal interest in the topic and the factors that influenced my world view as a way of interpreting the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Research Site

The research will be conducted at Anthony Michael University,³ a predominantly white public research institution in the Midwest. This site is important for this study because it actively

³ Anthony Michael University is a pseudonym for the actual research site.

recruits African American graduate students. It has a total enrollment of roughly 43,000 students including about 5,500 (13.0%) graduate and undergraduate students of color, with about 1,200 reported as African-American. Anthony Michael University awarded more than 1,400 doctoral degrees in 2010, but it is unknown how many of those students were African-American. Anthony Michael's principle value is to improve people's lives beyond the classroom by advancing health and medicine, educating young and old, building the state economy and enhancing the quality of life of its citizens. This is a summary of Anthony Michael University's mission statement:

The mission is to provide a learning environment in which faculty, staff and students can discover, examine critically, preserve and transmit the knowledge, wisdom and ...to help students to develop an understanding and appreciation for the complex cultural and physical worlds in which they live....It also seeks to attract and serve students from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds and to be sensitive and responsive to those groups which have been underserved by higher education.

African-American doctoral students attending Anthony Michael University warrant inquiry because while it is a university that boasts a commitment to diversity, it has only a total of 13% minority enrollment and a marginal amount (3%) of enrolled African-American students. By premiering the narratives of doctoral students attending this institution, it will help researchers and practitioners understand whether or not the institutions espoused values coalesce with their values with respect to diversity.

Participants

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context (van Manen, 1997). In turn, a purposeful selection method was chosen, as recommended by several authors for this type of research, in order to select information-rich data for this detailed study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). The study was limited to participants that self-identified as African-American doctoral students enrolled at Anthony Michael University. A purposive sample of

participants was selected. Purposive samples was useful because in qualitative research, using this type of sample projected “why particular people (or groups) feel particular ways,” and they convey the process by “which these attitudes are constructed and the role they play in dynamic processes within the organization the institution” (Palys, n.d.). Nested in the notion of a purposeful sample is an understanding of who an individual is and what their position is at the university (Palys, n.d.).

In addition to purposive sampling, I utilized a snowball method such that I relied on the suggestions of other participants of individuals that they thought matched the study criteria and were good resources for the study. I was interested in the narratives of self-identified African-American doctoral students currently enrolled at a predominantly white institution situated in any discipline and at any phase within their study. I interviewed nine individuals who are doctoral candidates (those who have completed all of the required coursework and exams and who have completed all but their dissertation). were included as a part of the study.

Assata, Carmen, Charles, DaShawn, Ivy, John, Monica, Robert, and Sally were chosen as participants because they have successfully moved through all of the phases of doctoral study. The participants in the study are underrepresented in their respective programs, and because of this, I have elected to describe them broadly to maintain their anonymity. The participants were raised in the Western, Eastern and Midwestern parts of the United States respectively. There are five cisgendered women and four cisgendered men. Many of the participants attended elite public, private, or parochial primary and secondary schools. They are ages 25-40. One participant is married. Another participant is a parent. All of the participants are classified as full-time students. They represent the fields of humanities, education, engineering, health

sciences, natural sciences, and professional schools. Some of the participants are in dual degree programs. Six of the participants will graduate at the conclusion of this study.

Consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important I focus on the subjective experience of African-American doctoral students that attend Anthony Michael University because they represent an underserved and understudied population. While I acknowledge that the perceptions and experiences of African-American students are not monolithic (Stewart, 2009), there may be essential elements of shared experiences around socialization, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and microaggressions unique to African-American doctoral students that will help inform how strategies are transferred to other groups (O'Connor, Lewis & Mueller, 2007).

Entry

After gaining approval from the Internal Review Board at the university, I contacted the university graduate student associations at Anthony Michael University that target African-American students and explain the intentions of this study. I asked the leaders of these groups if they knew of people who would be willing to participate in this study. I utilized my personal networks of African-American doctoral students to gauge interest. After I exhausted my networks and received interest from at least 5 students, I began data collection.

Procedures

The research study began with exploring the narratives of currently enrolled African-American doctoral students through examining their lived experiences while in school. Participants were interviewed three times for roughly 90 minutes each time. While the interview questions asked were open-ended, an interview guide was created and used prior to each interview. Interviews were audio recorded and conducted in person at a mutually agreed upon location.

The purpose of a three-interview process is to not only search for “the essence of the lived experience,” (Seidman, 1998, p. 16) but also to present a holistic view of the participants’ subjective experiences by putting their doctoral student experiences in the context of their academic lives beginning with childhood onward. The first time the participant were interviewed was to gain an understanding of their life in a context around being in school, and to further gain a sense of their academic life before graduate school beginning with academic experiences in elementary school, high school, and undergraduate school (Seidman, 1998). The second interview detailed the present experiences of the African-American doctoral student and included both challenges and successes that they encountered while in school. The questions asked contained core elements of the doctoral experience (coursework phase, dissertation proposal phase, dissertation phase), which allowed them to discuss their everyday experiences while being in school. The participants were asked to describe current support systems in which they were involved and how might these systems contribute to their success. The third interview allowed for the participant to reflect upon their emotional and intellectual connections between their academic work and their academic life. Academic life consists of experiences related to academics such as looking for employment within a university while working on a dissertation, maintaining peer relationships centered around dissertation writing, attending professional conferences, being Black at a majority white institution and in turn, allowed the respondent to make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998).

I actively listened throughout each interview, asked clarifying questions, and thought conceptually about what the participant said. To maintain focus in the interview, all conversations were recorded and each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Soon after the interview was completed, I typed comprehensive field notes related to what I observed and

heard. I then transcribed the interviews. Then, upon seeing the participants again for interviews two and three, I summarized narratives communicated previously and provided an opportunity to add any additional narratives or clarifications. The time in between interviews may varied and depended on the schedule of the participant and the researcher. The time intervals between interviews ranged from two weeks to six weeks.

Instrumentation

The interview protocol questions used in the interview were linked to Seidman's three step interview process and Nakkula and Ravitch's hermeneutic phenomenology questioning. There were no pre-assigned categories. Each interview contained its own protocol of open-ended questions. To gather data, I will use an interview protocol, write memos and keep a field journal as my chosen instruments.

Interview protocol. I began my interview process with a brief review of the nature of my study. The interview process was semi-structured in format insofar as I introduced the topic and then ask questions that were open-ended. Glesne (1999) notes that a semi-structured format allows for flexibility when talking with participants while, at the same time, maintaining some consistency and structure throughout all the interviews. I listened closely to the student responses and probed deeper, when necessary, to ensure that I was gaining an accurate understanding of their experiences.

I began each interview with a request for the participant to sign the informed consent form and note that the interview will last approximately one hour and thirty minutes (Appendix A). Next, each participant completed a list of demographics including their age range, and phase of study. Each participant selected their own pseudonym. Then, I turned on a digital recorder and explained the purpose of all three interviews and then explain in more detail the purpose of the first interview which is to learn about their academic life prior to doctoral study. I began by

asking open-ending questions and allowed for participants to describe any and all experiences pertaining to their academics to gain to help provide background knowledge about their life (See Appendix C). Although I have supplied a series of questions in appendices C, D, and E, the conversation was led by the participant and I only asked clarifying questions regarding their narratives. I conclude the interview by asking the participant to provide me with a feedback about the process or ask any questions. Then, I thanked them for participating in this first interview and immediately scheduled interviews two and three.

The second interview asked the participant to describe their day-to-day life as a doctoral student (see Appendix D). I began by recapping the first interview and then allowed for the participant to amend or further explain any part of the narrative from the first interview. I then described the purpose of the second interview and began by asking open-ended questions that centered on their academic program. While, in this second interview, participants had the opportunity to illuminate their feelings about their experiences, however, much of this line of questioning was reserved for the meaning-making interview—interview three. I concluded by asking participants if they had any questions for me or if they have any feedback about this process that they would like to share. I then thanked the participants and stop the recorder.

Interview three, the sense-making interview, had participants adding meaning to their entire experience as a doctoral student as they described what the process has been like for them and further explained what receiving a Ph.D. meant to them. They were asked questions that centered on what it means to be a Black scholar on a predominantly white campus, and if there are any other salient parts of their identity that has contributed to their academic experience (see Appendix E). I concluded the interview by asking them if they have any questions or any feedback that they would like to provide. I asked them to discuss what they would like to see

happen with this research and discuss why they agreed to participate in this study. Finally, I asked participants to discuss their feelings about the interview process itself and to describe what they had learned about themselves as a result of participating in this study. Lastly, I thanked them for participating in my study and informed them that I will provide them with a copy of my findings at a later date.

Memos. Memo writing is a reflexive exercise in which the researcher writes and reflects on the interview experience separate and apart from the note-taking process (to be discussed later) (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Memo writing took place in three parts (once after each set of interviews). The first memo called the analytic memo describes my interactions with the participant and covers the overall line of inquiry that I attempted to address. The second memo, termed the existential memo, discusses the feelings that arose for me as the researcher while I was conducting three phenomenological interviews (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). This exercise became useful as a way to reflect on my experiences while interviewing the participants and to tap into initial projections and interpretations before analyzing the data. The third memo is the integrated memo, which takes into account a descriptive analysis approach by examining words used by the participants to generate themes.

Field notes. After each interview, I took time to reflect on the categories and themes that appeared while conducting the interview. I noted any silences and emotions that I observed throughout the interview process. I noted individual areas that needed additional exploration, and documented overarching themes that relate to the racialized model of Black doctoral experiences. I organized my field notes based on the initial categories that developed as a result of the classifying process.

Researcher journal. Consistent with the hermeneutic circle, it was important that researchers foreground their research with a semi-autobiographic narrative that juxtaposes their story alongside the participant narratives. In order to do this, I kept a personal journal documenting my experiences as an African-American doctoral student who is currently enrolled at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest and who has attended mostly white institutions my entire academic career. Although keeping a journal might be considered self-indulgent and potentially capable of fueling researcher bias, it actually allows for another layer of critical reflection which is paramount not only in hermeneutic phenomenological research but also when attempting to understand the phenomena being studied.

Analysis

The data analysis methods used to carry out this study were in line with hermeneutic circle and drew from experts in interpretive qualitative research (Bontekoe, 1996; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1997; Seidman, 1998; Titchen & Hobsen, 2011) van Manen, 1997). There were five stages in the analysis (see figure 3) (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Throughout all stages of the data analysis, there were ongoing interpretations of the research text and the phenomenon how African-American doctoral students are experiencing graduate school. In addition, I checked my assumptions about the phenomena by comparing and contrasting these assumptions with the findings in the research text. In this way, I was able to address any prejudices developed from the literature and personal experience. Moreover, in addition to using emergent codes, I also used theoretical codes as provided by the Racialized Model of Black Doctoral Experience which include socialization, sense of belonging, self-efficacy and microaggressions. By constantly cross-checking my interpretations with the original transcripts, I maintained fidelity to the participants' narratives, grounding interpretations in the data.

Figure 3. (developed by Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007 p.622)

Stages of Data Analysis Developed for this Research

1. Organizing the data-set into texts
 - ☐ Iterative reading of texts
 - ☐ Preliminary interpretation of texts to facilitate coding
2. Identifying (participant) constructs
 - ☐ Coding of data using NVivo software
3. Identifying (researcher) constructs
 - ☐ Grouping constructs into sub-themes
4. Synthesis and theme development
 - ☐ Grouping sub-themes into overarching themes
 - ☐ Further elaboration of themes
5. Illumination and illustration of phenomena
 - ☐ Linking the literature to the themes identified above
 - ☐ Reconstructing interpretations into stories

Hermeneutic phenomenological strategy. The goal of phenomenological data analysis is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (van Manen, 1997, p. 36). Text may be viewed as both the data and product of phenomenological research (Smith, 1997). Phenomenological themes may be understood as *structures of experience* and offer a thick description of phenomena (van Manen, 1997). In this research, a systematic method of thematic data analysis will be used as informed by the Racialized Model of Doctoral Black Doctoral Experience, van Manan (1997), Seidman (1998), Titchen and Hobsen (2011). This method will allow for systematic identification of participants’ interpretations and constructs (first order constructs), which will then be interwoven with the researcher’s own understandings, interpretations, and constructs (second order).

As illustrated in figure 3 above, the following six stages of hermeneutic data analysis were developed by Ajjawi & Higgs (2007): *Immersion, Understanding, Abstraction, Synthesis*

and *Theme Development, Illuminating and Illustrating the Phenomena*, and finally *Critique of the Themes by the Researcher* were used in my process of uncovering how African-American doctoral students are experiencing graduate study at a predominantly white institutions. The stages are explained below. For the purpose of this research only five of the six stages were used and this is because the sixth stage—*critique of themes*—is depicted as the space in which the authors utilized outside reviewers to critique their findings as they presented data at various conferences.

Stage one: Immersion – Organizing the data. Text was constructed for each participant from interview transcripts, memos, field notes, and journal entries. These texts were collated into subgroups. I read and re-read all written texts (interview transcripts, and field notes) for each participant to become familiar with the text. I listened repeatedly to the audio recording of the interviews along with the relevant field notes. This immersion process (van Manen, 1997) included engaging with the meaning of the texts whereby the researcher is to get a preliminary understanding of the interpretation of the text in order to engage in the coding process. Field notes written after the interactions with the participants were used to facilitate the recreation of the context. Such dialogue was valuable for providing insight, considering alternative interpretations and contradictions, and thoroughness in interrogating the data (Barbour, 2001). I will use my own journal to be in conversation with the data and add another dimension of context.

Stage two: Understanding – Identifying first order ideas. First order constructs refer to participants' ideas expressed in their own words or phrases, which capture the precise detail of what the person is saying (Titchen & McIntyre, 1993; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007 p.622). The texts were coded (using NVivo software) to identify these constructs. During this stage, I identified

connections between the constructs found in transcripts, the constructs found the field notes, and journal entries. Each question and every student were coded separately and placed in sub-nodes where applicable. Using content analysis and the inductive logical approach, direct quotes were first extracted. Moving up the hierarchy, sub-themes were then derived from the numerous student quotes. The sub-themes were further analyzed for commonality in order to derive the over-arching themes of African-American doctoral students' experiences in graduate school. Some of the categories that were established from the data included: separation, microaggressions, addressing racial issues, navigating race, violence, being afraid, the role of peers, participant learnings. Two sub-themes, micro-aggression, and participant learnings were included as a consequence of the memo documents. My understanding of the participants' first order constructs were checked at each stage (see Figure 3) by allowing participants' to either further explain their responses or strike parts of their interview. This form of iterative member checking provided a progressively richer and deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and learning journeys, and were a central part of producing findings from the interactions between the researcher and the participants as the research progresses (Ajjawi Higgs, 2007).

Stage three: Abstraction – Identifying second order constructs and grouping to create themes and sub-themes. Second order constructs were generated using the researcher's theoretical knowledge, which were abstractions of the first order constructs. A computer file was created for each second order construct and all relevant subthemes from the transcripts, field notes and journal entries were copied into the file using the first order construct as a label. The interpretation of each interview transcript will be used to tell a holistic picture of participants' experiences, which then be used to inform and understand the data. Thus, at the end of stage

three all relevant text material will be grouped under each relevant construct for each subgroup, in order to answer the principal research question: how are African-American doctoral students experiencing graduate study at predominantly white institutions?

Stage four: Synthesis and theme development. Themes will be developed from the results of stages one to three of the analysis.

The second order construct files were grouped together into a smaller number of broad themes both across and within the three subgroups. This stage involves continuously moving backwards and forward between the literature, the research texts, and the earlier analysis--moving from parts to whole following a process informed by the hermeneutic circle (see Figure 2). This in-depth interpretation will help to identify meanings that the participants cannot articulate, but may have expressed non-verbally. Altheide and Johnson (1994) argue that tacit knowledge is the “largely unarticulated, contextual understanding that is often manifested in nods, silences, humor, and naughty nuances....is reflected in participants’ actions as well as their words and in what they fail to state but nonetheless feel deeply and even take for granted” (p.492). Considering the complexity and tacit nature of the phenomenon being researched, it is important to keep these nuances in mind. The themes that were derived from the data were: isolation, racial microaggressions, racial agency, tokenism, academic consciousness, code-switching, violence, fear, experiencing a collective, and self-discovery. In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme, my hope was to “unlock aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). Finlay (2003) contended that reflexivity in a research sense is the “process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings” (p.108). Not only did

the participants have an opportunity to reflect after each interview, I also reflected on each interview and my interpretations of sighs, clearings of the throat, other nonverbal cues to help move forward my understanding of what is being said and not said in an effort to tell a more holistic story.

Stage five: Illuminating and illustrating the phenomena. In this stage, I looked for connections to the themes and sub-themes identified to support my understanding of the data presented. The word “experiencing” precedes each subtheme to illustrate that constructs are being felt and understood by participants currently. Using the themes, sub-themes, and their interrelationships as a basis, I recounted the participant experiences by using their own words to illuminate how they make sense of their experiences as African-American doctoral students in the midst of graduate study at a predominantly white institution. Then, I concluded with three larger overarching themes (experiencing psychological warfare, experiencing the cultural politics of difference, and developing tools for survival) which are used to explain the larger phenomena.

Trustworthiness

I approached the phenomena of the African-American doctoral students experiencing doctoral studies with some pre-conceptions based upon my own experience with the topic. I examined my own projections of what I experienced, seen and heard, and reviewed them alongside participant narratives in whole and in part to reveal a more holistic meaning which may have been hidden. I paid close attention to silences, laughter, and information that was not said in order to gain a deeper understanding participant experiences (Wilcke, 2002). To ensure trustworthiness and that I was accurately representing the stories of the participants, I engaged in member checks.

Member checks are essential to elevating a study’s credibility (Guba, 1981; Lincoln, 1995; Shenton, 2004). As elaborated by Shenton (2004, p.68), “checks relating to the accuracy of

the data may take place ‘on the spot’ in the course, and at the end of the data collection dialogues.” In each subsequent interview, I asked the participants to clarify my interpretations about the previous conversation and I checked-in with them about questions that I had about the last conversation. I checked-in with participants as needed and I shared findings with them at the conclusion of the study for their reactions. I shared my findings with each participant and receive further verification that my interpretations accurately reflect the information that they provided.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher I kept in mind that it is my responsibility to protect all data that is provided to me by each participant. During the research process I ensured that each participant met the current research criteria (self-identified African-American doctoral student and is currently enrolled at a predominantly white university), and ensure that participants are provided with their rights prior to the beginning of the study and that I received informed consent from each person by having them sign the consent documents.

Because participants shared their stories of their current doctoral student experiences, I remained cognizant that the experiences shared with me were sensitive and I maintained their privacy by representing them using pseudonyms in the methods section of the paper and in the findings section and by removing each of their names from the transcripts. Additionally, I will keep all of the data collected through my research in a secured file cabinet for at least seven years and then I will destroy the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

“My whole academic journey has been about race...about finding a way to make myself feel more comfortable as a Black person”-Assata

When addressing my research question, “From the perspective of race, how are African American doctoral students experiencing graduate school at a predominantly white institution?”— I learned that Assata, Carmen, Charles, DaShawn, Ivy, John, Monica, Robert, and Sally are experiencing graduate school in a multitude of ways. In this chapter, I explore the ways that race shapes their lived experiences—which are situational, ephemeral, and multifarious. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as the frame, I sought to capture their stories and retain as much of their vernacular as possible. Because hermeneutic phenomenology requires that human emotion be included in the retelling of the stories, emotional indicators remain—including moments in which participants cry, laugh, sigh, and stutter.

Three themes are presented as subsections in this chapter: ‘Psychological Warfare’, ‘Experiencing the Cultural Politics of Difference’ and ‘Developing Tools for Survival’. Each overarching theme presented encompasses multiple subthemes to further explain the experiences of the participants. Under the umbrella of Psychological Warfare exists the following subthemes: ‘Experiencing Structural Isolation’, ‘Experiencing Psychological Violence’, ‘Experiencing Fear’ and ‘Experiencing Tokenism’. There is one subtheme presented under the auspices of Experiencing the Cultural Politics of Difference: ‘Experiencing Academic-consciousness’. There are five subthemes which subsume Developing Tools for Survival: ‘Experiencing Racial Agency’, ‘Experiencing Code-Switching’, ‘Experiencing Self-Imposed Isolation’, ‘Experiencing a Collective: the Role of Black Peers on Campus’, and ‘Experiencing Self-Discovery’. Each of the themes illustrates ways in which the participants in the study deal with the impingements on or complications produced by their racialized experiences within the academy.

Psychological Warfare

Psychological warfare—using biased, deceptive information, and other psychological techniques to mislead, intimidate, demoralize, dehumanize or otherwise influence the thinking or behavior of an individual (Doob, 2015; Szunyogh, 1955). Taken from the propagandist ideology in the midcentury, psychological warfare was originally used in times of war by propagandists. The purpose psychological warfare was to persuade the enemy by utilizing tactics that would ultimately have one's opponent believing the message of the oppressor (Szunyogh, 1955). The strategies used to convert the enemy included physical exhaustion, role modeling, and verbal persuasion. For psychologically heterogeneous groups, it is most effective when the following tactics are applied: 1) Boost loyalty and remind individuals of their moral obligations to endure combat or participate in the war. 2) Promise the largest possible privileges and rewards imaginable. 3.) Invoke or demonstrate punishments for weakness. 4) Assist with fighting fatigue by offering supplements (e.g. drugs, alcohol, and caffeine) (Szunyogh, 1955).

Psychological warfare in higher education—"the simultaneous application of both positive and negative motives by tempting promises and by the threat of punishment" (Szunyogh, 1955 p. 19) is represented in the findings of this chapter. Psychological warfare includes the categories of structural isolation, psychological violence, fear, and tokenism existing in academe and experienced by these nine African American doctoral students within one predominantly white institution.

Experiencing structural isolation. Among this group of participants, isolation emerged as a fundamental aspect of their academic experience. As I analyzed the data for times when they talked about feeling isolated, two types of isolation emerged—structural and self-imposed. Structural isolation referenced times when they talked about being underrepresented in their

respective classrooms, programs and departments. Carmen illustrates feeling underrepresented in her program: “If you’re looking around for other people who look like you, you’re not going to find them.” Robert describes feeling isolated as a result of having conflicts with non-Black students in the medical school.

Not everyone’s experiences is going to be the same as they move through professional school, grad school...whether it be masters or Ph.D.s...everyone’s going to have a different experience...As minority students, in grad school particularly...in med school as well I think it’s possible to do this...but I think even more so in grad school, it’s easy to really feel isolated when something goes on or where you have these sort of conflicts with our, uh, majority counterparts.

The structural types of isolation African American students experience lead to feelings of self-doubt and loneliness as they question their lack of belonging and their low self-efficacy. Ivy expressed feeling like an imposter as a result of structural isolation. “Being the only one—being the only black person at times gives me feelings of like, inadequacy. Feelings of like the imposter syndrome.” DaShawn provides the example below of when he expressed self-doubt as a result of his structural isolation.

I have experienced isolation. I’m experienced in having to manage self-doubt and do that on my own, having to question whether or not knowing that the space was not designed with me in mind, but it’s worth it, right? And how do I know if this makes sense because you work so hard to get into a program like this only to say “What am I doing here?” because if this is what I have to look for to move like beyond, right. This is what academic means. This is training me to be an academic, right. If this experience in this process is socializing me to be successful in academia I don’t want no parts of it. I don’t want no parts of it.

The participants also stated that structural isolation can also occur because of policies that remove formal systems of accountability as students advance to candidacy in the doctoral process. Monica describes the loneliness that she feels as a result of no longer having a system of accountability. “There’s like a lot of loneliness that I experience whether it’s just sitting at home [chuckle] and being lonely because I was didn’t have anyone to kick it with or again being the only black woman

in the room full of white women and trying to get my point across.” Lastly, DaShawn provides an example of the often competitive and individualistic nature of doctoral study as he describes the ways in which he is being socialized as a scholar.

I just don't know if that [higher education] if that's the best place for us to be in. I don't know if creating a space where folks feel like they have to be in competition with each other is conducive for that type of research....when we go out and attack other people or when we become professors but at some point it's not instilled in teaching because they've been taught that this is about—themselves. They [grad students] are taught that “Alright, the rewards are in research by yourself.” Um grants particularly you mean that they are partly by yourself, but when you are getting rewarded for it you definitely getting, you've done that by yourself. And I don't know at what point they [grad students] have learned to work with others. None of that says we're moving society forward. That's about moving an individual forward.

According to the findings provided by Carmen, DaShawn, Ivy, Monica and Robert, structural isolation in academe occurs as a result of being underrepresented in programs, classrooms, and departments. In multiple participant examples, loneliness, self-doubt, and conflict ensued as a result of this type of isolation. Structural isolation is the type of isolation which occurs as a result of being one of a few individuals in a program, such as being the only person of color in class or at an event, or isolation which occurs as a result of the immediate environment or campus climate. Structural isolation, for the participants in this study, occurred in the advanced stages of doctoral study. This was especially true for individuals who have moved beyond the phases of coursework which require students to attend weekly classes. Because participants in this study have attained dissertator status, there are no required check-ins via classroom attendance or mandated regularly scheduled meetings with advisors. Students often report that the dissertation academic stage in doctoral study is the most lonely and isolating for these structural reasons. And yet, students in the study also chose to isolate themselves, which further perpetuated feelings of isolation.

Experiencing psychological violence. In this section, DaShawn described what he considers to be violent acts that occur within the academy. I used DaShawn's definition of violence during the coding process as I was looking for ways in which psychological violence is depicted in academia. Violence, from his perspective, occurs when faculty members coopt student work and take sole credit; students coopt the work of other students; students perpetuating racist ideas or making egregious statements in class which are not addressed or ignored by faculty; and the isolating, humiliating, dangerous, and unsafe spaces endured by African American doctoral students while in pursuit of a degree that are often dismissed as "hazing" or part of the socialization process.

We can talk about academia. We can talk about the police force, right. We have, it has even become...it's like we are moving beyond targets at this point right because it's like this is the thing that is governing, right, us, creating the laws or creating the space in which we operate. And to some extent almost like vested in at least creating and not inflicting harm or intentionally because this is almost protection. It's like now it's me versus them or us, me versus them really. And so, where do you go? If you have to exist in the space where now the state is seeing you as an enemy or threat, where do you go? Now you have black men who are being identified as a threat. And they have been murdered by cops. Now the state has just taken his life. You have professors in the same. Now, I'm not necessary saying professors are like cops in that they're murdering black men but there are individuals who are stakeholders, within the space that you almost have to prove yourself to get to the space. And once you've done that you've been chosen. So there's definitely a sense of, I don't want to say it is assumed, right maybe like safety but there's definitely a sense of you want me the way that I wanted you. And I can see that it's insinuated violence because if it wasn't for me but when I get here. Right now this space has become violent and that's violence and I feel like you can be[pause] There are moments where you can almost be a casualty of, let's say, unintended violence, right? –DaShawn

If you think about the way language can be violent, right or, um, you are in a position of power, right, the way facial expressions can be violent. We can talk about the different forms of violence, but some of that is, I would like to say, one is better than the other right because you're always talking about intention versus impact. But if you are intending violence, right, like I'm always building or creating a process that is defined or situated in violence, right. When you're talking about someone feeling like this experience is a very hazy process. It is difficult once violence has been introduced into a space. It's difficult to not only

maintain it or control it, but to also remove it. What happens is that you put that out there and it almost becomes a cycle and not even waiting for it to be complex, but now we're doing it to each other. –DaShawn

And how cutthroat that can be like, I've heard folks, I've heard of situations where people had their paper stolen. Or that they were working on a particular, you know, like wrestling with some theory or some idea, but it would be applied in a way that was just like not what this person was going to do with it's like "Oh, this sounds good so let me just take it." What happens is that they will just fuck it up anyway because it isn't their own idea. But you just hear about how folks have to be so protective and guarded around this experience and—I think about what it's like for Black grad students, like, in professional schools.

Alright, let me think about what I have experienced and ensure that I'm aware of that when I teach my students, right. They're not putting service or grants or research at the center and they are putting students at the center. Right like they're saying I need to make sure that I don't do unintended harm to my students that they don't experience my classroom as violent or their interactions with me as violent because they may have this power to actually speak out against it. Particularly if they are of color I have seen these white boys go wild like do some crazy shit when it comes to like the way they even speak to professors. I'm like "Oh! That's crazy, right. And we're still like be their advisee and I'm like "Oh! There's no way that I could take that tone as a professor and still be here or be in this position, right. So maybe they will experience it as violent it just is. But if they're taking that approach and thinking, that's okay or that that works across the board that that's the space in which we're stepping into and so you should just be aware that. That's bullshit, that shouldn't be happening. And then that needs to be called out.

Further, DaShawn describes how students are experiencing violence, and as a result, have dropped out of school, or, in one case, developed a heart condition.

Right. We know advisors will have their grad students with their advisees work hard, right? I've heard of folks having like developing heart conditions because of the type of stress that their advisors put them under and their advisors taking all the credit for that work. That's violent because now this person is walking away with not just a heart condition but feeling robbed because they don't even get acknowledged in that way. Do better. –DaShawn

Sally shares a story about how she reacted to a meeting that she was called into after sitting on a panel and revealing to the audience that she knew of a student who had gotten pregnant and seemingly disappeared. Once she shared that information, the white faculty and

administrators of the department in which pregnant student was affiliated called her in to question her story, called Sally liar, but was unaware of the student in question. This experienced caused Sally to experience trauma.

So then he opens up by saying you know, you said some things at the panel that were concerning and I came back and talked to the staff about the [things] you alleged. They said the [student's] name and I'm like, yeah, that's not who I'm talking about. Um, 'cause the person they're talking about actually did get pregnant but [the student that referencing] she was four years younger than me. Um, and so, and they're like, oh, well who are you talking about? And I'm like, oh, such and such [student]. And then they just looked at each other and were like, oh, we don't, we don't know who that is. And so then I was irate and I just started yelling at people and I was just like— Put it to the man that called this meeting and I was like, I can't believe you brought me in here to embarrass me in front of all these people— These are, and these are people that I worked with. I just like went off and started crying and was like, you know, you brought me in here to scold me and you didn't even have your, your shit together. Um, and then, the director said, 'We're just as upset with you because you're out here spreading lies and challenging our work. And we care about our work. And, um, you just are talking about things that you don't know what you're talking about.' The senior women's administrator just said like, 'you have to be careful about what you say in, in very public forums because, um, it impacts what we're doing and we're trying to do our best.' But like this is unnecessary for you to call me in and don't believe me like this. And, um, just to kind of, like— The, the, the room was just— It was— Oh my God. I just felt so attacked. That was really traumatic and to this day I still cannot go, um— I have a very emotional reaction to going to that part of campus. To the effect of like if, if there are any meetings with, um, [those] people I don't go to that building. We have to meet at a different location. Um, and my boss is aware of this, just because of the trauma. Um, I mean I'm not diagnosed with PTSD but I just can't, not— Like I physically have a reaction going to that building. I shake, start crying, [I have to] hold back tears.- Sally

DaShawn continues to describe these instances collectively as a cycle of violence perpetuated by members of the academy in which he has no interest perpetuating.

Who's left, or who has to leave semester after semester, like it almost felt like folks were just disappearing. 'So, what happened?' Gone. Disappeared. We come to find out they were not being supported. We come to find out they were struggling in the ways I am now in year one and I'm like I can't imagine having to do that four years or five years. That is not making sense but it almost seems like folks are willing to accept that and then become professors and assume that if it happened to me is going to happen to folks that are advising. I'm like, now we're

talking about a cycle of violence. If you're thinking that because this happened to me that I have to do it to the next person or this is the way that you make, what, "A scholar?" [brief pause] No. I want no part of it. –DaShawn

For the participants in this study, violence is depicted as a normal part of the academic socialization process for doctoral students. It takes on many forms as it occurs both inside the classroom and outside of the classroom. For the most part, doctoral students have very little power and display little confidence to challenge the violence that they are experiencing at the hands of the people who are charged with guiding them, mentoring them, and teaching them. DaShawn depicted instances in which he was a novice student and described other situations that happened to more advanced students that suffered physical conditions stemming from their violent environments. Racism is violent, therefore, racial microaggressions fall under the guise of psychological violence.

Racial Microaggressions. Racial Microaggressions are the daily insults, assaults, marginalizations, and invalidations and silencing experienced by participants in the study. These affronts are derogatory in nature and challenge the participants' sense of belonging at Anthony Michael University. As Sue describes them (2010, p.29), microinsults are often unconscious interpersonal or environmental messages that "convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage." Monica, DaShawn and Robert provide examples of times in which they have experienced microinsults.

I'm very well-known in school now, but at first some asked 'do you work here?' and I was like "I'm a student here, thank you" and I was like, 'What did that mean?' You know, like, did she just think that 'cause I was Brown that I worked here? And I wasn't a student? So little experiences like that, but also walking in school and no one[sighs] this again, no one looks like you. It's exhausting. –Monica

The condition of the training that I feel like I received there has been, 'You don't have a voice,' because I was the only Black male in my cohort. I could see the look that I was given as I walked down the hall. I would see folks' kind of response to me like what are you doing here? –DaShawn

She didn't feel like the African-American students that fought to get their places prior to any of us being here. She didn't feel like they didn't have much of an effect on her being here. –Robert

As I continued to code for different types of racialized instances, Assata provides two instances in which fall under the category of microassaults. As Sue elaborates, microassaults are characterized by violent verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (2010, p. 29).

I came out of a grocery store one time and I saw a man with a shirt on that said ‘Slavery got shit done’ -Assata

And this is a program that pipelines people from the community into the university. So one is a traditional university classroom setting is where I'm saying I've had this conversation. Another program is not a traditional classroom setting, but it's still people by university professors, university resources are used to run the program, and we were under the impression that the student would be very happy to see a woman of color there, someone from the community, someone with background like theirs, multiple kids, multiple dads, and what we found is that the students were very skeptical.... And what this woman said to me was, ‘well, I need to be honest with you, I always talk to the white guy who's in the program because, um... I just didn't think that, um... I just didn't think that you – that you were qualified. Um... I just, for some reason I just didn't trust what you were bringing to the table.’ Those weren't her exact words, but that's pretty much what she was saying. Um... I had another – so, standing next to that same white guy, because he's someone who started working the program the same time I did, other black women would say to him, ‘Oh, when are you going to be teaching?’ or ‘Where you going to be tutoring?’ Then they would ask me, ‘Oh, did you graduate from the program? What year did you graduate?’ Now this program was designed for people who, um... to give them six college undergraduate credits. When I came here, I had already had an undergraduate degree. It never dawned on these students that there was a chance that I could possibly be an instructor, possibly already have my bachelor's, let alone completing a Ph.D. So those have been my experiences where students have questioned me, whether its Black students or White students, but my colleagues have never questioned me, ever. –Assata

I continued to code for feelings around racialized incidents in academia, I found that both Ivy and Assata discussed times in which their academic experiences were negated or invalidated.

These feelings are categorized as microinvalidations. Microinvalidations are often unconscious and tend to “exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue, 2010, p. 29).

I think that sometimes if you're Black and you're researching “Black” things, sometimes you can get pigeon-holed. Sometimes people will think that your research isn't valid. Because for whatever reason, if you're Black and you research Black people, it's not considered as valid. But if you're White and you research White people, then you're the real deal you know? -Ivy

White folks are like, let's not damage them. Let's not expose them. Let's not have them talk about the things that they're already experiencing. Let's act like it doesn't exist. These people who have been studying theory forever, from [Anthony Michael University], um, and education, they're trying to tell me that their [knowledge of] theory outweighs my experience as a black woman. –Assata

Monica, Robert, Ivy, Assata, and DaShawn described myriad instances in which their university community status is questioned, they have been insulted by students and colleagues, the validity of their pursuit of research involving race has been challenged, and their racialized experiences have been marginalized in favor of the extant literature.

Racial microaggressions for Assata, DaShawn, Ivy, Monica and Robert occurred daily as their community member status questioned, their research interests invalidated, and their credibility as educators and scholars questioned. These types of invalidations and insults fuel climates of hostility and caused the participants to question their belonging because they felt unwelcomed. These feelings of marginalization and invalidation and insult described a large part of their lived experience while in pursuit of their degree. Violent environments are breeding grounds for inducing anxiety, self-doubt, and fear.

Experiencing fear. Fear takes on many forms in the academy. African American students at predominantly white institutions often demonstrate that fear by choosing to be silent in instances in which they may want to speak up, speak out, or exercise their authority. For the

African American students in this study feared that if they are to use their voice to challenge authority members, there may be no more students of color to follow them. In this section, Charles and Ivy describe instances in which they have suffered from anxiety around adviser feedback, were afraid to try new things because they have been discouraged in the past, were afraid to talk to or meet with their advisers, and fear resulting from being the only person of color in the room and wondering if they were not present would there be any people of color represented. Other participants experienced fear as a result of departmental guidelines, institutional deadlines, completing tasks, speaking up, or speaking out against injustices.

I'm not being discouraged [laughs] but I'm not being like overly encouraged either, but so like yes, that's all I guess like I spent like a weekend or something like that writing this application tuning it up, and I feel pretty good about it, but I still have this fear at the back of my head of like, 'Oh, crap, I'm gonna send this to my advisors' and they're going to be like 'No, this is not a good at all' or like 'You shouldn't even submit it o blah, blah, blah' like, even though I needed those kind of just—kind of the fear—it's kind of been engrained to us as students or like, "Hey, you shouldn't..." Whatever the advisors say goes. They are more important, you don't know anything. Even though I knew that this was just, like, a kind of cycle, and I was trying to combat it like, "No, wait a minute, I've done like four of these applications now, I know what I'm talking about, I kinda crafted this well. It'll be fine," I would still be apprehensive, like I kept checking my email to see like if my advisors would comment about the draft, my advisor didn't comment about the draft until I already submitted it, but then I kept like ignoring that email and when I finally opened the email and my advisor was like "Oh, the draft was very good" and was just like "Ooo" [laughs] I was kind of like "Darn it! [laughs] the fear got to me again!" Like, you psyche yourself up to, like, believing doubts and stuff... it's so interesting that you just psychologically just psyche yourself up and thinking like "Oh my god, I'm doing a horrible work. I don't know what I'm doing" or... Yeah, and I think yeah that's the part of the culture you just get used to being told that, this is the way we do it, this is the way we've always done it, umm, "you try to do something new, I don't know about that but you can try" [laughs] and so yes, you just automatically I always scared to do anything new or venture out. —Charles.

One of my other friends, has this, like, kind of contentious relationship with her advisor, where she's like scared to go to meetings with her. And like her advisor is putting her down and is like rude to her and stuff like that. So I feel like good

advising is someone who, like, supports you and doesn't make you feel bad about yourself. –Ivy

It's scary sometimes when you're the only person in the room. Because if I wasn't there, would there just be no one there? And you think about the other rooms where there probably isn't anyone. And that can be scary sometimes. Like if you go to a meeting and you're in class and you're looking around, and you're like, "I'm the only one!" Like, if I wasn't here, would there just be none? It just makes you sad sometimes. –Ivy

For the participants in the study, their fear stems from oppressive power dynamics. Power dynamics as is reflected in the quotes provided above were instances in which students were apprehensive about meeting their advisor because of past negative encounters, or discouraging conversations. The negative interactions caused the participants to reluctantly engage with faculty members. This was not the only anxiety producing incident. Fear also occurred as one student reflected on the institutional commitment to diversity and questioned if she was not present then who would be present to tackle racial issues. This reflective thinking suggests that this student was thinking beyond themselves and considering the impact that their presence has on future African American students.

Experiencing tokenism. As I looked for codes to explain the experiences of being underrepresented, words such as token, blending-in, diversity were used by participants to illustrate their experiences. I then created the theme tokenism based on these codes and used the participant language to illustrate both the burdens and challenges of being underrepresented. Tokenism, as defined by the participants, is the practice of making only a symbolic effort to recruit a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of racial equality within the institution.

The burdens of underrepresentation. The ways in which tokenism is negatively experienced often included being the only person or one of few underrepresented people in their respective departments, which includes serving as a spokesperson for all Black people, feeling as

though they have to blend in, and being used to advance pseudo-diversity plans and pseudo-diversity agendas by naming themselves as tokens. Monica, Charles, and Carmen describe the negative sides of tokenism.

I am almost representing Black women, you know, because I am a Black woman, and I'm constantly asked opinions about this, and I've really tried to separate—like I said—like, this is my opinion, this is my experience, but, for a lot of White people, they take my experience as: this is all of Black people. –Monica

I've always been, kind of, the only one [African American in his department] for a long time, so you just kind of get used to blending in. –Charles

Sometimes it just hurts to know that we're in 2015 and I'm still making headway as the first to do this, that, or the other. Um, I feel like we—we are so far—past slavery, that it shouldn't be my generation that still doing—being the first to do this, or the first to do that. [Whimper] There should have been people long before us—in our footsteps, right? It shouldn't be just me in my department. There should be ten, fifteen, of us. I shouldn't make up the one percent of my college, I shouldn't—I should not be that person who—is charting paths, right? Paths should have already been laid out for me. So, it hurts sometimes to know that white privilege has so oppressed us still to the fact where even my parents, who should have been afforded this opportunity, weren't. --Carmen

And so there are very few African-American people. Um, and I'm in [STEM] so there is even fewer African-American people. And, um—here it seems like it means that you are the prize. Right? You are the golden child. You get to represent the college as if it's diverse. There is only a few of us and so we get chosen to do lots of face time with people to make it seem as if we have African-Americans on campus. Um, so what it means here on this campus is that the campus is moving forward, even though it isn't. When they get to know you or find out about you then they want you because they want to advance the diversity plans. It's not really about you as a researcher. Um, it's about how you add to diversity in their field. Um, how it makes their workplace look. So they're not really bringing you on to help you, they're bringing you on to help them. And sometimes you just have to use that to your advantage. If you end up getting to where you want to be and you know they most likely hired you because they want diversity and [you don't know] if they're going to treat you right or get you what you want, you just have to go with it. Sometimes there is nowhere else to go. –Carmen

The benefits of underrepresentation. Tokenism does not benefit groups, but there are instances in which the individual participants below have not only acknowledged that their

institutions are using them to advance, but they are wrestling with and acknowledging the benefits to being one of few Black people in their programs, departments, or school. Robert, Assata, and Carmen provide examples in which they have gained greatly (i.e. free tuition, leadership opportunities, being the face of their programs, serving as the “expert” in diversity matters, and in Assata’s case, receiving a scholarship created just for her because she was unable to pay her rent). These instances can be categorized as part of the advantages of being one of few or the only African American in their respective programs. The quotes below suggest the benefits of being underrepresented.

Aside from being one of the few, the proud, per se, I think that it’s put me in a position, umm [clears throat], of advantage, per se, where I’ve been able to get to know people...and I guess also because I’ve been here for so long, it’s given me an opportunity to sort of become the face of...I guess diversity in the med. school here. Umm, [sighs] and I’ve [clears throat] gone to a lot of...or I’ve been a minority at a majority institution pretty much all of my educational career so in some ways you...you sort of get used to it but not necessarily accepting it as is and knowing that things could be better or wanting things to be better and working for things to be better but, umm, at some point in time you sort of just know the type of institution that you’re going to and you get used to it. But for me, I think that it’s provided me opportunities to do things that I may not have been able to do at other schools or, umm, and even particularly, uh, places like HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] for, uh, some of the extracurricular things that I’ve done, so as I mentioned, I think that being [one of few] here has really worked to my advantage as a student, as a leader, umm, and just my...my overall development. Uh, and I...I also think that it’s benefited me because I’ve been able to participate in these leadership roles that are involved in recruiting minority students that I can see the pitfalls of the organization or of the institution and where things need to be addressed. Umm, and just know that just because I’ve had, uh...just because I’ve had people that have been on my side or, you know that’s not always the case with everybody that comes in. –Robert

And our department was getting audited and I remember one of my advisors specifically asking me, and the other minority students that I knew in the department to be on the student board for the auditing of our department. And they would come and audit everything, our curriculum and – and things like that. I didn’t think anything of it when he asked me because I was a new student and I was the only new student at the time in his—in his lab. So I was thinking, okay, he’s just asking me, because I’m a first year, to go audit. And then when I get

there and all the other minority students are there and I'm like so all of your advisors asked you to come? And the answer was yes. Then there was a closing banquet and normally the closing banquet, first years don't go. And again, it was me and the other minority students all together at this closing banquet where first year students don't normally get invited to and—and we had spots at the head table, with the people who we're doing the auditing. At that point, I realized, this is either one of two things. Either we made a really good impression during the student advisory stuff or our advisors who did the invitations to the banquet, um, want our department to look like we are racially diverse. And this is the only way to do is to have us at this banquet. [Pause]. And it was just—it was like, "Here are our token kids. We're actually doing something about diversity in our department." And that was not at all the truth. Two African-American students out of a hundred White students doesn't make this department diverse. —Carmen

People, they've put their money, they've invested their money in me. So I've had my White professors, one of my White professors recently, um, pushed for my department to create a scholarship for me because I didn't have the money to pay my rent. So he create the, he ask for how much did I need. I told him how much I needed. He contacted my department—because now he's not physically in that department, he has a different position in the university—but he started out in my department and he contacted them, he used his power and his connections for them to create the scholarship in the amount that I asked for. He also used—he, he knew— what...and I expressed to him that my children were without dads. He paid for a bed for one of my children. —Assata

I've been told I'm an expert in diversity, in social justice, in cultural competency because again, like I said, I'm always kind of called upon. —Monica

I do believe it [being African American] opened many doors just for the sake of diversity. Whether or not it's true or not, um, that those were the things that got me to where I am. It has helped me in the fact of that I didn't have to pay for school. —Carmen

Yeah, I've benefited from the system, I'm not gonna sit and here pretend that I haven't. But I'm the exception, not the rule. —Sally

Participants in the acknowledged that they have benefitted and been troubled by the responsibilities of being underrepresented in their programs and departments. Tokenism for them occurred because they were pursued and subsequently required to speak expertly on matters of diversity simply because of their phenotype. Participants understood that their phenotype and culture had both positive and negative political implications.

Experiencing the Cultural Politics of Difference

The cultural politics of difference (CPD) refers to enhancing a more inclusive, decolonized, multicultural, multiracial disciplinary discourse (Harrison, 1993; West, 1999). The participants in the study depict the internal dialogue that they experience resulting from their racial experiences on campus. Participants experiencing CPD, describe the racialized commentary that they endure from White and Black colleagues regarding their bodies, and their social status. These conversations that address their perceived respectability or idealize racial stereotypes, are formed in large measure by discrimination and exclusion. However, depicted below are innovative and intellectual forms of internal dialogue and reflection that expand our notions of racialized consciousness within academic spaces (Harrison, 1993; West 1999).

Experiencing academic consciousness. Academic Consciousness is an umbrella term used to describe the African American doctoral student's ways of knowing within the academy. It includes an understanding of how African Americans are perceived by both people of color and non-people of color in academic spaces. This encompasses a mindfulness of how their black body is perceived in majority white spaces within the academy. In this study, African American doctoral students often experienced double consciousness- seeing yourself through the eyes of others and recognizing that the manner in which African Americans view themselves is not how the world perceives them. The participants describe that these two ideals are at war with one another and they are often unreconciled (Dubois, 1903). Assata provides an example of how she is at odds with how she is perceived by Black women, White women and White men.

Whereas black women, I look too much like them. And so, in me, they see what they could have been or the choices they could have made. And I think that it makes life very, it makes them uncomfortable. Um, but if I show up looking like them and acting like them, it reaffirms to them every day that they made the right decision. 'I made the right decision by holding off having children. I made the right decision by not getting involved in these jacked-up relationships and not

taking these risks with these men. I made the right decision by putting my career first.’ The other way that I look at it is, a lot of times Black people, we are so entrenched in politics of respectability that when another person shows up and they’re not living a life that’s considered respectable, then it’s, why are you making us look bad? Whereas White men are not rooted in either one of those histories. So they’re not rooted in Black, in Black folks’ politics or respectability and they’re not rooted in Black people’s, um, Black women’s decision—or White women’s decision, for that matter, matter—to hold off children, having children until they’ve completed whatever. So they don’t have the same stake. The stakes are not the same. They need to deal with me being an individual. So I feel like they have that privilege to just deal with me as an individual. –Assata

In educational settings, the African American doctoral students’ in this study experience double consciousness while engaging with individuals who may pity them, patronize them, or see them as someone in need of saving. Assata provides an example of triple consciousness (Fanon, 1967) when she is confronted by the intersections of her identities as an unwed Black mother in her department.

I was walking to the elevator with this very big belly, so maybe I’m at seven months, eight months, six months—whatever it was, I was big. And she’s down the hall, way down the hall, and she says ‘Oh, Assata, we’re going to invest in birth control for you.’ Another incident where a colleague, in another department—the president of my department because of the job that I—because of the help that I was giving her with her writing but she’s a, she’s a student in another department says, “Why don’t you wear a wedding ring to look more respectable?” Um... ‘You know, I think people will, um... look at you differently if you—if you wore a wedding ring.’ So, if I was dishonest about my status I would probably be treated better. And then a black male colleague says, ‘You know I understand, you know, about you being pregnant because my sister who was on crack, um... she was pregnant, she had five kids also.’ I’m like what the What the hell do I have to do with your crackhead sister? Um... how we equate these things like...it’s not the same. Um... and so just, or Black women who are, who are kind of treating me like a wooden door, like...you know, I don’t really want to associate with you because you’re kind of like the troublemaking Black girl or... we don’t want that trouble being associated with us. So, White women who are like you’re setting the feminist movement back however many years. Black women who are like, ‘Can you please stop having these babies and not proving the stereotype,’ Black men like I don’t really know what to do with this so I’m going to connect you to my crackhead sister, um... or white women who are saying, you know, ‘Let’s look more respectable. Let’s play into the politics of respectability.’ Which is not necessarily associated with feminism, so... you know... So, all of these different ways—I’m at the intersection of all these

different, um... beliefs. And readings of my body as a Black woman, and my choices. So, I think it's not just being Black, but it's – being Black, sexuality is represented through motherhood, and how people are reading that. Black—a black mother, and how that's being read. –Assata

Assata provided vignettes which depict two racialized instances in which she wrestles with how as a Black mother moving through graduate school, she is perceived and engaged with by other individuals in her department. Recognizing this, she wrestled with the politics of being Black, and a women, and unmarried with multiple children as she described herself at the intersections of these identities. Assata explained that she was viewed by other Black women as a stereotype (single, multiple children, and multiple fathers) who makes other Black women look bad or she is publicly chastised by White women for her choice to have multiple children and remain unwed or pitied by them and asked to lie about her marital status. She was constantly confronted by the politics of respectability from Black men, Black women, and White women as these people engaged with her based on their ideas of what is socially acceptable. In these vignettes we learned that as a doctoral candidate, she recognized and wrestled with the fact that there individuals who did not treat her respectfully or associate with her based on her multiple identities.

Developing Tools for Survival

In this study, the nine African American doctoral students developed mechanisms for surviving the psychological warfare that they experienced. These mechanisms aptly called 'tools for survival' were in response to the environmental and emotional triggers resulting from their experiences within the academy. The subthemes that illustrate their tools for survival are: 'Racial Agency', 'Code-switching', 'Experiencing a Collective', 'Self-Imposed Isolation', and 'Self-Discovery'. Some of these approaches appear to be more favorable for certain individuals over others, especially when experiencing race in the academy is considered.

Experiencing racial agency. The African American students in this study were often tasked with the responsibility of negotiating race in public discourse. Facilitating racialized conversations in public and in private were not only an expectation for the participants, but were as commonplace as attending class. As I coded for the instances in which the participants' expressed a desire to address, pay attention to, handle or feel a responsibility to tackle racialized issues, I termed this racial agency. Participants also described feeling an expectation of spearheading or tackling race-based conversations which frequently produced complex emotions. The African Americans in this study variously described their experiences as burdensome, tiring, empowering, and invigorating. Charles, Assata, DaShawn, and Robert expressed their desire to respond to racial incidents which are happening to them or around them for the purpose of uplifting the Black community or to address deficit narratives that have been expressed in the literature. These individuals expressed a desire—almost a call to action—to current and future Black graduate students to do something about racialized injustices as they continue to occur.

Well, [clears throat] the students' protest movements or Black Lives Matter like Young Gifted and Black, all those things have definitely shaped my lens of the academy or shaped how I see the job or work that needs to be done... being part of the academy how – what work needs to be done, umm, they definitely take a CPU [Central Processing Unit also known as “head space”] space though ‘cause these are things that, you know, maybe white students or white faculty are not concerned about. They can kind of look at this protest and these movements and say “oh, wow that’s great. They should, you know, they should have, equal rights or like freedom of speech” and then they just kind of ignore it, whereas a black student you can’t ignore these movements that are kind of the hurt and the anguish it’s getting expressed, you have to – you have to address it, yeah, at least me personally I think like I had to address it, I have to talk about it, I have to process it ‘cause it’s gonna take up, it’s gonna take up a CPU hours. You had to kind of address it face on, umm, and I mean it doesn’t necessarily shape my research which is kind of very narrowly focused and very technical, umm, but it does make me think about how I can be more part of the solution in all these movements from where I am, I may not be able to go to every march and do things like that, but what can I do to actually address some of the concerns that are being raised by, you know, these movements and it just make sure I’m making

people more socially conscious and things like that, so it definitely takes a CPU hours of the day but I think it's something that's important, it's something I can't just disengage from and be a student. It's just a part of, like, I'm a black student so this is a part of the—the burden, so to speak. —Charles

I think what it means to be on this campus, it means to take full [*Pause*] to be fully engaged ...so that I can present quality research on communities that are normally exploited in other people's research. ... I think the bottom line of what I'm trying to say is for me to be here means that I take full advantage of everything they offer that I can take back to a community of other black folks and a community of scholars...to explore marginalized folks in literature, marginalized black women, marginalized black mothers and to represent them in a way that does not focus on pathologizing them, but to represent them as whole people, to bring their voices to the literature, um, versus to impose a dominant perspective on them. —Assata

I've had such an issue with the way professors are like creating spaces or conditions which can be violent or traumatic for students. I feel like I have some responsibility, right, to be in that space and create that counterculture to counter that space so that I am not sitting here thinking, "Oh! Well, you're just a casualty of having a system that sucks." —DaShawn

Honestly, looking at my own 'success' ... for me it doesn't really mean much unless I'm able to help someone else get into a position that they want to be. —Robert

Charles, Assata, DaShawn and Robert's desire to confront racial issues stemmed from a sense of obligation to make the campus environment a little less hostile for them and for others. It also comes from a need to move marginalized voices and experiences to the center of public discourse and add to larger conversations about equity, inclusion and freedom. Significantly, despite the agency that participants displayed to address issues surrounding race in various public discourse, the attacks on their personhood were daily and at times were almost insurmountable. The participants in the study were aware of these racialized practices taking place as they saw how others viewed them and in turn they would make decisions based on the treatment that they received by the individuals that they encountered.

Experiencing code-switching. Code-switching was one of several approaches to navigating the psychological warfare that they experienced. As I coded for ways in which participants navigated their majority White environments, I found that code-switching was a tactic used by participants engage with their White colleagues. Code-switching is usually described as the act of switching from one language to another in the same conversation. With African Americans in particular, code-switching is a strategy used to fit in with the dominant group. It is not only a shifting in language, but also a shifting in presence, and personality. In this case, the participants in this study described shifting from discussing cultural topics and events that are familiar to the individual and discussing themes that are described as foreign. In the example below, John describes a conversation that he had with his White advisor as he discussed topics and engaged in activities that he had no interest in and no knowledge of so that he may enhance his opportunities to advance.

I understand, um, the process and I understand that, um, I am the advisee and that advisor has authoritative power, and I just try to understand, um, and listen to, um, what I guess another perspective of my advisor may be, um, if not known or, um, if told to me to try to understand that. I mean I just understand that I am not in a space to [sigh], I guess, have any say just, just yet, if there's any conflict I guess or any, um, difficult situations. So, it's in my best interest to understand what my advisor is saying even if it's a difficult situation for me because I am the advisee and she is the advisor. I get that. –John

This is one thing I learned about academia: if you're going to have a relationship with people who are from a different age group, different race, from a different place as you, you gotta find some commonality. And a lot of times, how you have to find this stimulus, I guess, for a relationship, is to find something that you have in common. And I had nothing in common with this guy, but whenever he talked about things he was interested in, I acted interested in that also. So, sailing was a means for interactions and maybe some talk about school work. Just like golf can be used as a tool in the business world to network, and talk about business, right? That's what sailing was used for. I've never gone sailing to... Well, I'd been on a boat, but never went sailing until he invited the research team that I was on, to have a research meeting on his sail boat. We didn't talk about research, we drank beer, and looked at the water, and talked about white people-ish. That's what I

did. [We talked about] all things that black people typically don't do. 'Typically' is keyword. Um, we talked about like good brews of beer, we talked about sailing jargon, joining hoofers, Birkenstock sandals, um... When a White boy is going bald, we talked about that... Um... Oh, they talked about how they found this new golf course... I'm being very serious right now. It's... I'm laughing, but these are the things we really talked about, how, um... I don't know, this... How he'd place his students on the research team, he got a new set of golf clubs, and found a new, golf course that was close to campus, that he was using, and then this other guy, um... He was like, 'Oh, I wanna come.' Stuff like that. So, you know... White people-ish. –John

As John described above, code-switching became a necessary tool for him to advance within his program and on his research team by shifting his language and personality to be perceived as more affable to his white colleagues. This behavior is quite common for individuals who are underrepresented racially and culturally. Being in environments in which underrepresentation is constant, participants have often opted to remove themselves from environments and situations in which they have deemed cold, antagonistic, or unsympathetic.

Self-imposed isolation. I found that self-isolation occurred in this study when the participants chose to remove themselves from environments which they perceive as competitive, hostile, unwelcoming, or unsafe. When referring to self-imposed isolation, DaShawn said: “As I think, I am in the moment. I’m like, none of this even matters, right. I think in those moments I say that I’m going to hop in my truck and leave.” I also found that participants sometimes choose to separate themselves from their support systems and peer groups as a coping strategy to successfully endure the challenges presented while moving through doctoral study. Assata provided two examples below of a times in when she removed herself from a group that she created to help her to combat her own isolation.

I learned that I have a lot of deep-seated anxieties and fears that I was carrying on my own that I didn’t have to carry because there’s a community here that I helped start that I had divorced myself from, that no one had told me to go away from.

And so, while I helped create and construct a space to accommodate the isolation, or to address the isolation that comes with being black, I did not consider how to

construct a space that accommodates the isolation of being – that comes with being a mom, um... And so, what I did, in effect was—I had been trained [stammers] in effect to be a middle class white woman, well I have. I had somehow that summer trained myself to address the needs associated with being a black person in grad school, um... but forgetting that while I was part of that community, I was also part of even a smaller community which is a black single mom in grad school. And I did not necessarily create a, uh... a plan for that. And so, two years later, I'm still like, "Where's my community? I don't have a sense of community." As opposed to coming back to that same group and saying, "You all—when we, when we plan, how can we plan to be inclusive in this way?" I just kinda phased out of it. —Assata

Self-imposed isolation refers to instances in which participants choose to disassociate or distance themselves from their usual support systems. This self-imposed isolation was used as a coping strategy on the part of some participants as they sought to avoid criticism or judgment from peers and colleagues. Examples such as DaShawn wanting to hop in his truck and leave school or Assata withdrawing herself from a group that she used as a support system were examples of this. Coping mechanisms are initially adaptive and protective and served a purpose in participant lives, but they can sometimes be over-applied and have maladaptive consequences.

Experiencing a collective: the role of Black peers on campus. Collective identities have long figured prominently in the African American lived experience and are often one of the ways individuals in the study claim and exercise racial solidarity, especially in the face of oppression and opposition. They are often used by graduate students in predominantly white institutions as a way to navigate their social positions, offering them a sense of belonging in what might be perceived as a hostile or unwelcome environment. Collective identities figure prominently when a minority group's status relative to a dominant racial group brings about feelings of exclusion, isolation, loneliness, and self-doubt.

After multiple conversations with Assata, Monica, Ivy, DaShawn, Charles, and Sally it was clear that Black peers and peer groups play a critical role in their day-to-day experiences. These individuals often formed groups or sought the presence of multiple Black individuals that,

for many of them, served as their community while moving through their academic journey. In the collective community, graduate students describe looking to the peers as avenues for combating issues that stem from an absence of belonging, low self-efficacy, and lack of socialization. Assata, Monica, Ivy, DaShawn, Charles, and Sally, identified instances in which peer groups played a role in critical moments of their academic journey:

The group [all black writing group]...really helped with my mental health. [They] helped my isolation. Um, it helped with my anxiety of always having to make the decisions. I think the word collective is the best word. I felt like I was part of a collective. I feel like I'm a part of a collective. And it really helped me start getting my work done more regularly again. –Assata

Just seeing them and knowing that I'm not the only one just drives – drives me forward. We talked about what it means being black on campus, things that white people say to us and things that we've experienced and just being in the group and talking about those things it's uplifting to be in that community and have support. –Carmen

My colleague that is going to graduate this year has definitely just become my role model like goes out of her way to send me things that are relevant to my research. –Monica

My interactions with my black peers have been very academically fulfilling and refreshing 'cause all of the sudden it's like 'well, alright he's my friend so he's doing this good work'. –Charles

I love my friends here [at Anthony Michael University]. My friends are amazing. Our friends are, so they're all smart. But not just that, they're all just kind people who understand that we need each other to succeed. I don't have friends here that are interested in leaving anyone behind. Um, oh, I'm about to get all teary-eyed. Okay, wait, wait, wait. Okay, so, um, none of my friends believe that we can exist and do this on our own. We hold each other accountable. We don't let each other stay in our apartments too long, left unattended without hearing from each other. We will check, we will call, we will call each other to go check, we will call the police to go check. We're not letting each other go hungry. We're not gonna let each other study alone. We're not gonna let each other feel isolated. Um, we will be aunts and uncles to each other's children. Um, we would employ our friends and peers' children. I have, my kids clean my friends' houses. My kids always trying to make money and so my friends, you know, keep them from [*sigh*] feeling like they have to do things they shouldn't have to do. They keep them employed. We have a community. We definitely have a family. ... I would have never imagined that I was

coming to a place where I would have this. A family in many ways. I couldn't have chosen them better if I went through a catalog and picked them. Just an amazing group of folks. –Assata

So I've always been in predominantly white areas, and I feel like, in grad school, the black kids, you know, the kids of color, we all are there for each other. So that's the nice thing about being black at a predominantly white institution. And we can, you know, in some ways make those ties a little stronger. The ties between black people a little bit stronger. –Ivy

[As someone in a dual degree program]: the first two years of med school, my support system, my peers, got me through those courses. Two of my friends in particular are black women. And in grad school, my peers in particular got me through critical, like critical periods. Now that I'm back in that school, it's kind of sad because I don't have that. And that's maybe part of the reason that it's a little bit of a struggle. –Ivy

I do feel connected to folks. I check on folks and any time I can go to an event and see people, I do. And I get invites and stuff. My roommate is very involved in black community too. So if she's going to something, and if I'm available, I'll tag along. I've seen—I've gone through a couple of generations of black communities here and I feel that the black graduate community that's here now is probably one of the closest knit that I've seen in a while. I probably started to pay attention to black grads maybe, in 2006 or 2007. And this is by far the closest knit black graduate group. I really like it. I think people really support when they look out for each other and help each other a lot. I do feel like I'm a part of that. It feels sort of really good. –Sally

I feel like my friends....Not really what you look at that notion of role model seems almost like hierarchical like it has to be someone like a mentor. It had to be someone older. It just has to be someone who has experienced that shit that you haven't. And I don't need to look right beyond me. I can look to my left and my right. My friends are my mentors and role models. –DaShawn

I know for the black grad students that I met, it was always about, like, how I can help you become better? If we can discuss these ideas and it's helping to strengthen either your argument or the way you think about this—we're winning here. –DaShawn

Although Black peers were regarded by participants in this study as crucial to their success and fulfillment while moving through their academic journey, it is important to note that John felt as though Black peer groups and Black people on campus have a nominal role in his doctoral career. He describes his thoughts on the role of Black peers as follows:

I think what I want to say is that...so when you analyze and look at this interview, and use it for however you want to use it for, just know this: this probably is the...is a perspective of a Black grad student here at a predominant white institution that has not been the recipient of a lot of black support here. Actually, I don't like a lot of black people here, not because of who they are, but just I almost feel like black people here, um, they may have their cliques but cliques is okay. I get that. Um, but I don't really feel like it's, it's...I don't really find a lot of black people here have been looking out for other black people. And guess what? They don't have to. So I'm not mad at them, but all in all I feel like a lot of my responses are based on me feeling like, 'OK'. You know, I have some black friends here or I have support, um, from people in general and, um, I can't really say that I've experienced a lot of support from the black community that much. —John

The Collective, as the theme suggests, interchanges Black peers for Black community.

The findings overwhelmingly suggest the positive influences that Black students have on other Black students as they are powerful social, mental, familial and academic support mechanisms. There was one instance, however, in which one participant—John—acknowledged that while he has some Black friends, he perceives that the Black campus community to be a clique of which he is not a part nor from which he receives much support. But for Assata, Carmen, Charles, DaShawn, Ivy, Monica, and Sally, Black peers in predominantly white spaces aided in helping them feel less isolated and alone.

Experiencing self-discovery. Self-discovery describes the participant learning that took place as a result of the three-part interview process. Each interview of the three interviews contained a reflective component about the interview process itself, and the last interview in particular asked participants to describe what they have learned about themselves at the conclusion of the study that they may not have realized before the study began. Monica, Assata, Sally, Ivy, Carmen and John reflect on their self-discovery.

I think that it's really important to show is that we can do this and we can uplift one another. —Monica

[I learned] it's very important for me to take care of myself. Because I'm about to jump into my dissertation, um, project. I also begun to see a therapist so, that's really refreshing, um, I think everyone needs therapy [laughs] whether you think you're OK or you're not. And so I look forward to meeting with [my therapist] every two weeks I kind of go and talk to her, but I'm... and she is a woman of color, too. So it's kind of refreshing to have that perspective when someone from the outside be like "Well, I don't know if that was racist, but [laughs]" but also having fun like I travel that's like the thing I do, I travel all the time. Um, I probably go shopping like once every other week, which isn't a good habit, but [laughs] something I feel like I got to do once in a while. —Monica

I think I was having some—I was having a lot of suicidal thoughts because I did not have the resources to match the life that I had. The life that I love. But it was too overwhelming, too much responsibility, not enough support. And, and going through this, these interviews, the question, I think it was second interview or the first one. If I feel isolated and not supported, why wouldn't I go back to the group that I started? And I was talking about because I did not want to inconvenience people with my children. Interviewer said, but no one ever said that based on what I said in the interview. And you know, she really encouraged me to go back to the group. Going back to the group kind of alleviated, definitely, more than 98% got rid of those suicidal thoughts 'cause now I have the resources. I have human resources. —Assata

I think as I've learned more about different theories about oppression, power and privilege, and system as it relates to individual identity. I think it's made me more of an advocate. So I think that's made some of my work more critical, and also like pushed it to move beyond de-constructing different things, to moving towards solutions. I try to pride myself and say I'm going to critique and de-construct. At the end of my article, or whatever I'm writing, whenever I'm speaking now I try to pair my critiques with solutions. —Sally

I think that I learned... wherever I go next, I need to make sure I will have access to peer support. Because that's like—that's the only way. I can't—I'm not—I'm not a 'go at it alone.' People are like, 'Oh, I don't like study groups'. I need people to like, push me. - Ivy

I've learned that, uh, that I love to – um, ignore things that happen and just not think about them. Or – not process them. Um, and I don't know if that's good or bad. Um, I don't know if that places positively or negatively with my mental health. But I know that when racial things happen, I just tend to just ignore them, brush them off, keep going. If I can say something or do something at the moment, I will. — Carmen

[I learned] that I [pause] am very good at doing what I need to do, even if it's not the most fun thing, that I will need to do. What I mean by that is I know a lot of people who, if something wasn't maybe fine to them, or it wasn't as they may

expect it or may want it to be, they quit, like drop out. That's ridiculous to me. But then I also can say that I, I, um, feel that I make the best of situations. And I can say that during my time here I've had fun. Um, it's been a lot of things that may not be like the best or like the greatest, but I make the best out of the situations or I try to. So, I think that's what I've learned mainly because some of the questions in these interviews have, have...has asked me to really think about a lot of different experiences and situations. –John

There were myriad learning outcomes that took place at the conclusion of the study for the participants. Monica learned that she needed more self-care. Assata and Ivy learned just how important peers were to their academic experience because for them, being a part of a community alleviated harmful, isolating, and debilitating experiences. Carmen and Sally learned the importance of addressing racial issues. Carmen, who chose to ignore racial issues in the past, learned that she has to address racial issues while Sally indicated that when now addressing issues she will become more solution orientated. And for John, his biggest learning was that not only was he resilient throughout his academic tenure but he also had fun and tried to make the best out of situations that he described were not always the best. According to the self-discovery findings presented in this study, it is clear that the participants learned that their mental health and wellness issues need to be addressed, that peers can aid with mental health and academic challenges stemming from isolation, and that confronting racial issues are central to their experiences.

Summary

The themes represented in the findings represent, from the perspective of race, how the African American doctoral students in this study are experiencing a predominantly white institution. Although each of their experiences are unique unto themselves, in many instances there were commonalities shared. The participants explained the important role that Black students play in their understanding of themselves as they use peers serve as critical support systems and serve in the capacity of mentor, friend, family, and confident.

The participants also shared the ways in they experience daily racialized insults--marginalization, alienation, silencing and invalidations that are closely associated with their research interests, their knowledge of racialized issues, or simply because they are just Black. In some instances, the presence of their Black body resulted in others questioning their presence and existence in campus community spaces. These instances and the increasing public discourse around race has led many of the participants to confront racism and consciously discuss race in both public and private domains. Most of the participants expressed feelings of agency as they displayed an increased responsibility to address race which became common practice for many of them.

While confronting issues, there was an instance in which one of the participants wrestled with the stigmas with being an unwed Black mother with multiple children. Humiliated, isolated, pitied, and likened to crackheads, this participant believed that she was characterized by individuals in department as unrespectable, a stereotype and setting the back the feminist movement. This participant understood and wrestled with the cognitive dissonance between the political and racialized histories of Black women as the ways in which she was being treated and engaged with in her department. She knew how she was seen and used this knowledge to advance in her department.

African American students often use explicit strategies to advance within the academy. One of the ways presented in this study was code-switching. One participant illuminated his process of discussing the topics that often interest White people (White people-ish) when he has no knowledge of or interest topics like sailing, drinking beer, playing golf, and going bald in an effort to gain opportunities associated with being on a research team. Code-switching becomes a

useful strategy on the part of the underrepresented group as use the language of the dominant group to garner opportunities.

African American doctoral students in this study were often the only Black person in their respective departments and were often used to advance institutional diversity efforts. The participants in the study described themselves as tokens—symbolic representations of diversity. They discussed the burdens and benefits of being the only or one of few in their departments, programs, and schools describing instances in which they have served as the spokesperson for diversity. At the same time, many of them acknowledged that they have also benefitted from being the only one either by gaining leadership opportunities, public recognition, or by substantial financial gain.

African American doctoral students are in unique positions within the academy as they often serve in the role of future faculty colleagues and administrators. As such, they learn the socially accepted norms and behaviors which make for successful scholars. This chapter described the under-examined ways in which one participant explained how the academy can often socialize students to become violent and perpetuate a cycle of violence. Violence here is connoted as undue rigor, intimidation, intellectual property theft, hostile classroom environments, emotional abuse, and denigration. Graduate students were frequently ignored, bullied, harassed, and socialized to believe that this type of treatment is appropriate and a normal part of the indoctrination process. Once full-fledged membership into the academy is established, it is expected that some of these forms of treatment continue. Many participants in this study indicated that they were afraid to speak up and speak out against faculty members and characterized themselves as being afraid. Fear stemmed from previous negative encounters with faculty. Fear stemmed from being underrepresented in their departments. Fear stemmed from

understanding that the consequences associated with exercising agency may lead to a stripping away of diversity efforts altogether. The participants in this study reflected on their fears and other learnings as a result of participating in this study.

The African American doctoral students participating in this study have always been hyperaware of how they are responded to and are perceived as a result of being Black attending a predominantly white institution. Yet, for many of them they had never been asked to reflect on their academic experiences prior to my study. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as a tool for self-reflection was empowering in a different way. Many of them learned that they needed to address the emotional self-care needed to move successfully through this process. Others learned that their methods for coping in the past such as self-isolation —were no longer working and expressed a commitment to reconnect with positive support systems. Each of them expressed that that this process was cathartic and gave some insight to their academic experiences more holistically. Many of them learned to speak up, or recommit themselves to other Black students while others learned that their overall experience was not so bad. Overall the participant's developed a greater sense of self-agency and self-efficacy. In conclusion, the findings suggested that the ways in which Assata, Carmen, Charles, DaShawn, Ivy, John, Monica, Robert, and Sally experience race at a predominantly white institution, although individual in nature, many of the findings presented are shared with this researcher who is also an African American doctoral student attending a predominantly white institution and is her final year of graduate study.

In accordance with hermeneutic phenomenology, it is imperative that I discuss the ways in which I am not distant from the participants in the study. Therefore, as I reflect on my own experiences as an African American doctoral student, it is important that I acknowledge that I too

have experienced some, but not all, of the themes that my participants have—albeit not always in the same ways.

The impetus for this study began when my community status was often questioned while I served as an instructor for a School of Nursing. Like Monica, I experienced racial microaggressions from White academic staff, janitorial staff, and faculty who asked me from week-to-week if I needed help or directions as I made my way to teach my class. They did not recognize me as someone who belonged at the institution in the role of instructor. As an instructor I was mindful of how my students perceived me—someone unqualified to instruct them—while at the same time acknowledging my expertise. They saw me as an expert on all things Black—hair, language, culture, race, racism, poverty, systematic oppression. I chose to use their perceptions of me and other people of color to dismantle deficit notions that they have about Black people writ large. The students were aspiring nurses who—for many of them—was the first time they were responsible for examining their own ethos, ideologies, and identities and put them in conversation with power and privilege. For most of my majority White female class, I was their first African American instructor and for some of them I would be their only Black instructor. Each racial incident that occurred in class I had a responsibility to address and not simply because it was a function of my role. I tackled each conversation because they told me that in no other class addressed race. As a fellow student, my students were disadvantaged in this regard, but because of the agency that I felt, I could not allow for them to go through their academic career without having challenged them or their ideas about the people of color who they would inherently serve.

Upon acceptance into my doctoral program at a predominantly white university, I was offered and agreed to work with a highly visible research team pursuing research agendas that

spoke to both my academic and career interests as a diversity scholar-practitioner. Upon my arrival at institution I was informed that I would no longer be working with the team and I was moved to another building. My supervisor informed me that his reasons for revoking the position was due to me no longer being a “good fit” to work with the team, although the supervisor agreed that I was still a good match for the work. In an effort to not disrupt my finances, the supervisor kept me on the roster, but gave me very few assignments and neglected to tell the staff that I was no longer working with them. To most people who inquired, it was assumed that I was a member of the research team when in actuality I was not. Instead I worked alone, but truth be told, I did not really work at all. As I think about the themes related in this study, I would categorize this as blatant structural isolation.

Although I have experienced structural isolation, I have not experienced self-isolation. I work best when I am in the presence of others and especially working on teams and in groups. Although I understand why some may find that they work better alone, it is important for my own scholarship, efficacy, and belonging that I work in community. My community at the predominantly white institution that I now attend is comprised of Black graduate students who share a commitment to graduating Black master’s and doctoral students. I have been a member of this group since my doctoral career began so I do not know what it is like to be without the group nor have I experienced the same levels loneliness and lack of belonging as a result. When I need someone to edit a conference proposal, I turn to the members of this group. When I needed to prepare for my proposal defense, I practiced for hours with this group. This is the group that I have turned to meet my academic and social needs. When I injured myself while writing this dissertation, they picked me up from the hospital, brought me my medicine, cleaned my home, fed me, dressed me, and typed my fifth chapter while I dictated to them. When I

succeed they succeed, and that has been the commitment that we have made to one another until we graduate. We are accountable to one another. This is useful because in the moments when I have not been diligent getting my work done, or have lacked some academic support, they have been there to ensure that my deadlines are met and that my work has been completed. My community here takes on the attitude of *I-do-We do-You do*. Like Assata, who also spoke about the familial nature of her Black writing group, the group that I am a part of is self-determined and exercises a commitment of care that has been unmatched in my entire experience within academia. I have only benefitted from feeling as though I am a part of this community, and yet, I can understand, for those who are not, would feel disconnected, isolated and alone. It is because of the commitment that my Black peers have made to me and mine to them, that I choose to share the stories of other Black doctoral students who are attending a predominantly white institution so that others will begin to understand just how nuanced and layered *our* experiences have been.

Chapter 5: The Full Arc

“People are sent into our lives to teach us things that we need to learn about ourselves”
-Mandy Hale

“SO WHAT DID I LEARN?”

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to conducting research requires that the researcher take a reflective attitude to conducting research, and in turn, reflect upon the research process itself. This chapter presents my understanding of the research method, the ‘ah-ha’ moments that occurred, and what I found challenging about leading a research study when I identify so closely with the experiences and identities of the sample population.

As I reflect back and make meaning in different ways, I am confronted with my experiences as an African-American doctoral student attending a predominantly White institution who, at the same time, also searched for an understanding of the experiences of other African-American doctoral students attending one predominantly White institution in the Midwest. I used hermeneutic phenomenology as my guide for interpretation because it reminds me that the researcher is not separate from the participants and meaning is made and remade through text. This method is unique because its goal to discover meanings which are not usually apparent through intuition, analysis, and description (Spiegelberg, 1982). In addition, this method reminds me that reflection before, during, and after the interviews is inherent in the process.

It was because of this method, and utilizing Seidman’s three-interview method for collecting qualitative research, that I was able to ask participant’s questions that not only required them to recollect their academic experiences growing up, but also asked them to describe their current everyday experiences and then to make meaning of those experiences separately. It required that I ask them to take a moment to reflect on the interview process itself and to discuss what they have learned about themselves as a result of their participation. Doing this provided me with methodological findings that enriched my study. In turn, through this

dissertation process, I am required to ask myself the same reflective questions: Was I able to express myself in the way that I wanted? What did I learn about myself as a result of conducting this research study? Now that the study is over, how do I feel? This chapter represents my reflections as a researcher using a hermeneutic phenomenological frame. So what did I learn about myself using this approach?

I learned that many of the experiences that the participants were having, i.e. suffering from microaggressions as the result of being Black, experiencing isolation, having peer group interactions, experiencing fear while struggling to find their voice, and producing agency when confronted with racial issues on a daily basis are much in line with mine. It was not until after I had read their transcriptions, and by reflecting and reading my own journals and memos, that I came to the realization that I not only had been experiencing similar things, but also some of my experiences over the course of my doctoral career could also be categorized as emotional abuse. While I don't see myself and as abused individual, when I looked up the definition of abuse, I saw that to be abused is to have your integrity be demeaned, and your value be questioned. I found that benign neglect is also a form of abuse. That was striking to me because as I moved through my doctoral process, there were many instances in which I had adverse encounters where I had been unadvised, and quite frankly, I had felt that some faculty members had absolved themselves of their responsibility to teach me.

As I was processing the interviews of each participant, through reflection, I thought back to when I heard their stories of trauma and triumph, and I listened to them discuss the ways in which they have both benefited and been burdened by their experiences dealing with race. It was a challenge to interpret that information in the moment, sometimes because I may have been

tired or I had multiple interviews in a single day. In other instances, I found that this process was challenging because participants had recalled experiences that I had also faced.

The most difficult interview for me was the interview in which Dashawn describes experiences that in which he named as violent and provided accounts in which he knew of individuals who, in addition to himself, had also experienced violence. It was only through using hermeneutic phenomenology that I recognized that psychological violence can be cyclical and systemic. Hermeneutic phenomenology gave me the freedom and the latitude to not only use DaShawn's definition of violence to come up with a broader claim (i.e. psychological warfare), but it also allowed for me as a researcher to give credence to his examples. And, as a doctoral student myself, his naming something that I had felt and experienced but did not know what to call, unlocked, for me, a newfound understanding. In fact, I likened this method to the fourth quadrant of the Johari window—"you don't know what you don't know"—as this experience has illuminated for me that I did not know that the academy perpetuated cycles of psychological violence. I knew that violent experiences occurred, but prior to this study, I thought people mistreating people or bad things happening in the academy was due to individual actors and highly contextualized situations.

Because I chose to use hermeneutic phenomenology an approach to understand and interpret everyday experiences of the African-American doctoral students in my study, it was important to discover the meaning of their everyday experiences that were not obvious. Through the processes of interpretation, description, reflection, re-reflection through the use of the hermeneutic circle, I have developed the courage to write about the ways that African-American doctoral students experience graduate school in a way that I believe is nuanced, holistic, and expressive. The method called for me to keep the participants' expressions of emotions so that

readers could understand and, in many instances, see and feel their pain, their gratitude, their frustration, their anger, their confusion, and their sadness. I kept their emotions in the stories that they told because it makes for a richer story and so that the data could speak for itself.

Mentoring other Black students behind the mask

While conducting interviews, I noted that, for many of my participants, it was the first time that they had been asked directly about their experiences in total: from the time they got up and went off to elementary school in the morning, to what their experiences were like as doctoral students today, and to explain the significance of getting a doctorate. After many of the students spent 4.5 hours or more explaining their lives, they often looked to me for answers to the questions that they had been thinking. What was challenging for me, and I could imagine a bit frustrating for them, was that when they were sharing their experiences, they wanted me to be their friend. I could see that, at times, they were looking for me to console them, encourage them and validate them in ways they went beyond just listening. Albeit difficult, I did my best to focus entirely on them even if that meant holding back from expressing the kind of emotions that would signify solidarity and empathy (i.e. crying when they cried, providing consoling touches). Instead, I left space for them to react however they wanted, stopped the recorder if they needed a moment to regroup, and summarized their stories so they knew that I was listening. So, even though it was counterintuitive to hide some of my emotions, that is what I did. At no point did I ever want the participants to feel like they needed to stop and take care of me. It was their time to process, reflect, and make sense of their experiences. Because of the intimate nature of what they had shared, my research method allowed me to get to know the individuals in a short amount of time, and in a very meaningful way. For those participants that expressed feeling disconnected from others, these interviews provided them with an opportunity to feel listened to and

understood. And for me, as a scholar who had entered what could only be described as the loneliest part of the doctoral experience, it gave me an opportunity to connect with many more African-American students.

Conclusion

As I reflect on the messages that have been explored in this dissertation, I would like to summarize what I have learned more clearly. The most important domain of this work using hermeneutic phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of African-American doctoral students as an African-American doctoral student is how their radicalized experiences involving their sense of belonging, socialization, and self-efficacy depict the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and characteristics of real people. It provides an avenue for my interpretations of these people and working with them in constructive and innovative ways.

The one thing I accept wholeheartedly is the responsibility that I tell each story and mirror their reflections as they told them to me. I'm fully aware that the findings and analyses articulated in this study may be misunderstood, misinterpreted, and may even be misused. I have learned to accept this inevitability and I am grateful to know that every interpretation holds the capacity to drive the understanding of the lived experiences of African-American doctoral students at predominantly White institutions a step forward. (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

Lastly, I believe that as a result of the participant findings and my own learnings as the African American doctoral candidate who served in the capacity of researcher, I believe that there are new and more complicated ways of addressing socialization that should be discussed. In fact, I believe now that the ways in which African American graduate students are being socialized in the academy is to be subjected to experiencing psychological warfare (that is, isolation, psychological violence, fear, and tokenism), the cultural politics of difference (e.g., an understanding within academy that one and developing coping mechanisms to survive as a response to their racialized experiences. Based on this, the figure below represents a model of understanding how African American doctoral students experience race at a predominantly white institution.

African American Doctoral Student Experience Model



As advanced in earlier chapters, I learned that African American doctoral students' are experiencing psychological warfare. The model above represents the relationship between the phenomena—psychological warfare, and participants reflections and behaviors in response to the phenomena. The initial arrow stemming from psychological warfare and moving toward academic consciousness represents the connections between psychological warfare and how the

participants think about psychological warfare within the academic realm. Academic consciousness an umbrella term to include both double (seeing oneself in through the eyes of others) and triple (awareness of one's body, race, and heritage) consciousness. The development of an academic consciousness then leads to behaviors in which allow for participants to deal with the phenomena by developing tools for survival. The tools for survival include self-imposed isolation (that is, choosing to excommunicate one's self from groups), code-switching (a shifting in language, presence and personality), developing Black peer networks (establishing same-race relationships), and racial agency (a responsibility to address race and racism in public and private discourse for the purpose of dismantling racist ideologies and/or uplifting one's community). This model advances our understanding how African American doctoral students experience race within predominantly white academic spaces and may also provide a lens into how race is experienced throughout the academy.

Chapter 6: Discussion

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”- Audre Lorde

“What does it mean when the tools of a racist academy are used to examine the fruits of that same academy? It means that only the narrowest parameters of change are possible and allowable” (Lorde, 1984, p.110). I am critiquing academia as an African-American doctoral student within the institution itself. From my perspective, there are three major conclusions that can be drawn from the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis explaining how, from the prospective of race, nine African-American doctoral students are experiencing graduate school at the predominantly White institution that they are attending.

Experiencing Psychological Warfare

First, these nine doctoral students are experiencing psychological warfare. To be clear, psychological warfare is described as using deceitful or misleading information in an effort to cajole, demoralize, denigrate or otherwise influence the ideas or actions of an individual (Doob, 2015; Szunyogh, 1955). The tenets of psychological warfare within higher education are structural isolation, psychological violence, fear, and tokenism. Structural Isolation, an embedded part of the doctoral process, occurs when doctoral students are separated from other students at the advanced stages of doctoral study. The autonomous nature of doctoral study causes students at this stage allows students to feel cut off from traditional academic support systems (e.g. classes, mandatory check-in meetings). This was exemplified when participants questioned their existence within the academy or expressed their loneliness and lack of belonging.

Psychological violence, as described by the participants in the study and as evidenced in the literature is “any act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity,

dignity, and self-worth” (Weber & Kelley, 2013 p. 161). Psychological violence was depicted in this study not only as stealing the work and ideas of others, but also as racism in the form of racialized insults, assaults, and invalidations to an individual’s personhood, culture and community (Sue et al., 2010). Furthermore, benign neglect by faculty—not providing useful feedback or absolving oneself of the responsibilities to educate African American graduate students—is a form of emotional abuse and abuse is violent (Gay, 2007). Studies have shown that graduate students of color need to have explicit and detailed feedback so that students can develop cogency in writing and research (Gay, 2007). Faculty claim to be advocates of students of color, however, may take on a cavalier approach to providing them with proper guidance and instruction.

In my study, participants alluded to being apprehensive or exhibiting some anxiety around sharing ideas with their faculty advisors. Fear (both an emotion and an action) is defined as being afraid of (someone or something) as likely to be unsafe, painful, or threatening (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Fear was expressed explicitly from the participants in the study because some of them felt as though if they confronted racist comments or were perceived in any way other than pleasant that their fellowships may be taken away, or that funding would be revoked from future African American doctoral students. Racism within the academy produces the cycles of violence experienced by the participants in the study and these cycles of violence, fear, isolation and tokenism are symptoms of racism that exists within academe.

Scholars have found that racism is a permanent attribute embedded within higher education (Allen, 1992; Brooks & Arnold, 2013; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2004; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986; Solorzano, 1998; Stewart, 2012; Truong, 2010; Truong & Museus, 2012). While they acknowledged in their studies that students experience

marginalization, dehumanization, pity, infantilization, and other assaults, as does the present study, extant literature make no explicit connections to the systemic cycles of emotional abuse and psychological violence that exists within predominantly white institutions. To date, there has been little examination of how doctoral students experience psychological violence and fear within the context of higher education. Prior to this study, only Truong (2010) and Truong and Museus (2012) addressed coping with racism and racial trauma among doctoral students of color, but those analysis is limited to the symptoms and coping of negotiating racialized experiences. Their studies did not use double or triple consciousness as an antecedent for racial agency. And further, although each study acknowledges the permanence of racism respectively, both Truong and Museus ignore that the coupling of microaggressions, isolation, tokenism, and the maltreatment of African American doctoral students in graduate programs is violent.

With the exceptions of Truong (2010) and Truong and Museus (2012), only Gildersleeve et al. (2011) and Gonzalez (2006) analyze the only studies that center on how doctoral students of color cope with racism. However, those findings only articulate the experiences of Black and Latino doctoral students and Latina doctoral students, respectively. The current study represents the first hermeneutic phenomenological study that outlines how African-American doctoral students from various academic disciplines—from the perspective of race-- they experience graduate school at a predominantly white institution. Finally, it is important to highlight that, unlike other studies that describe their experiences or use transcendental phenomenological approaches (Truong & Museus, 2012), this study addresses the psychological warfare that is omnipresent within higher education institutional contexts.

In fact, prior to this study, only Leonardo and Porter (2010) explicitly points out the system of violence perpetuated within higher education, and emphasizes race dialogues with

White people as violent spaces for people of color. But his body of work focuses largely on K-12 spaces and in those environments, children are mandated to participate in the educational system (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), whereas doctoral students voluntarily elect to participate in a system that forces them to negotiate their own versions of psychological trauma to achieve a higher class status and/or attain additional cultural capital. This current study not only “names” the system of psychological warfare as an inherent function of academia; it also asserts that, because of the systemic nature of racism, that racial microaggressions, isolation, alienation, racial trauma, tokenism, psychological violence and the pedagogical practices of fear are integral components of this system.

Doctoral students voluntarily engage in higher education practices and are actors in a system that they are unaware is inherently violent. Achieving a doctorate is the pinnacle of the educational system and African Americans have been indoctrinated to believe that receiving a doctorate prevents them from experiencing certain types of racism. However, Dubois (1903) challenges this notion and suggests that this idea is a fallacy:

The price of culture is a lie. Why? Because Black people will not succeed in American society if they are full and freely themselves. Instead, they must endure petty insults with a smile, shut their eyes to wrong. They must not be too frank and outspoken and must never fail to flatter and be pleasant in order to lessen white unease and discomfort. Yet, this suppression of black rage—the reducing ‘the boiling to a simmer’—backfires in the end. It reinforces a black obsession with the psychic scars, ontological wounds and existential bruises that tend to reduce the tragic to the pathetic (West, 1999 p.105)

Why would African Americans willingly participate in a system that has promoted eternalized inequity for the past 100 years (Harper, 2016)? Most African Americans, including those participating in the study, are often first-generation college students. Hence they cannot discuss the socialization process or the life of an African-American doctoral student while growing up because many of them were not surrounded by African-American scholars (Gay, 2007).

Furthermore, many African Americans grow up believing in the meritocratic ideologies that

permeate early educative upbringings (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Weiss & Fine, 2005; West, 1999). This was evidenced by several participants in the study who expressed their deep frustration and pain around their parents expressing to them that if they worked hard that they would do well, while at the same time seeing their parents work hard and still suffer from the vestiges of slavery (Gardner & Holley, 2011). And unfortunately, for those in the study who grew up with African-American scholars as parents/as mentors, some believed that “to struggle” is an inherent part of the doctoral experience. And even those same individuals who expressed that they were meant to struggle, they too expressed contempt around the notion that in 2016 they remained underrepresented in their disciplines, in their programs, and at their institution.

According to doctoral socialization scholars, to question, to reason, to challenge, to learn, to wrestle with concepts and ideas are inherent to the doctoral learning process (Hardre & Hackett, 2014; Hardre & Hackett, 2015 Twale & Kochan, 2000; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001. To learn how to conduct research, to present your ideas cogently and succinctly, to make a substantial contribution to your field—these are the things that should transform a novice student to an advanced scholar (Laird et al., 2007; Miller & Irby, 1999; Owens & Witherspoon, 2011; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Weidman & Stein, 2003). African American students, however, must contend with not only challenges of academic rigor but, for them, “to struggle” means to be structurally isolated, to feel as though you have to go at the process alone, to have little to no academic guidance, to not speak your mind, to be afraid that if you do speak you will be dismissed or disregarded for opportunities to advance (Gay, 2007).

Most of the African American doctoral students in the study were inclined to self-silence sometimes because of fear and intimidation. Participants expressed being fearful to confront

advisors, or being afraid that opportunities would diminish if they expressed themselves to faculty and colleagues. Fear (both an emotion and an action) is defined as being afraid of (someone or something) as likely to be unsafe, painful, or threatening (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Participants are reminded that that if they elect to tell the entire truth about their racially, emotionally, and psychologically violent experiences and discuss the pedagogical practices of fear in which they are subjected, they may not be believed or suffer from gaslighting (that is, thinking that they are going crazy; Gildersleeve, 2011), or that other African Americans might be negatively impacted. To take on this type of oppositional stance, one which promotes racial agency, would be to disrupt the academic mainstream cultural construct of “kumbayah.” Unfortunately, the culture of mainstream doctoral education ostensibly presumes that scholars should embrace these norms and rules outright, which can potentially alienate African American doctoral students, undermine their self-efficacy and sense of belonging, and keep them from engaging in other conventional activities of doctoral study (Gildersleeve et al, 2011; Twale & Kochan, 2000; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Experiencing the cultural politics of difference

The second conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that African-American doctoral students are experiencing an academic consciousness as they navigate the politics of their racial difference within the academy. To have an academic consciousness is a particular way of knowing in the academy that your social identities are linked to how one is perceived by others. Participants in the study claimed that they were fully aware that their racial status was being used to advance the institution’s (often unfulfilled) diversity agendas, and that knowing this fact allowed for them to capitalize on leadership and financial opportunities. There were

other instances in the study in which participants demonstrated a particular type of knowing when in academic spaces to exercise silence, or to limit their candor, or manage egos.

There are unique characteristics of academic consciousness that reject monolithic and homogeneous ideologies in favor of diversity, equity, social justice and inclusion (Feagin, 1992; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; West, 1999); to discard the type of bracketing that presumes to be objective in favor of specific, nuanced, and reflective understandings (Nakkula & Ravitch, 2009; Seidman, 2006); and to take into account academic life history, context, and plurality. Academic consciousness is inclusive of both double-consciousness (that is, seeing oneself through the eyes of others; Dubois, 1903) and triple-consciousness, meaning, to be simultaneously responsible for one's race, body, and ancestors (Fanon, 1967). Participants in the study demonstrated the ways in which they understood how they were being perceived by other students, faculty and colleagues and that knowing often fueled their racial agency.

These signs are not new critiques and yet what makes this unique is two-fold: (1) that participants in the study recognize that individual actors are participating in a system that is inherently racist and psychologically violent and, therefore, the same faculty members and other "agents of change" that may share diversity agendas and social justice values are operating in a system that is still oppressive and they themselves may in turn be oppressing the individuals they are charged with supporting; and (2) linking of participants' understanding of the cultural politics that exist in connection with academic consciousness, which in turn informs their racial agency and how and what constitutes difference among their various racialized experiences, the seriousness and importance it is given in representation, and the way in which premiering racialized issues that shape the doctoral experience at this time in academia acknowledges some interruption from the previous forms of analysis (Harper et al., 2009; West, 1999). Frankly, the

new cultural politics of racial difference consists of innovative responses to the detailed circumstances of our present moment—especially those of marginalized actors who shirk negative self-representations (Mellor, 2004; Truong & Museus).

The new culture of politics of racial difference is demanding that predominantly White institutions be less psychologically violent (Clark et al., 1999; King, 1991). It embraces the distinct expressions of doctoral students who attempt to empower and enable social action and, if possible, “to enlist collective action for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality” (West, 1999 p.129). This strategy, however, places African-American doctoral students in a double-bind, while connecting their academic, social, emotional, and psychological undertakings to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions. Yet, without social or political pressure from both inside and outside academia, transformation or reformation becomes a challenge and disruption is improbable (Gasman et al., 2004; King, 1991; West, 1999).

This study takes an anti-homogenizing stance and suggests that not all African-American doctoral students are ‘all in the same boat’ in terms of how they are subjected to racism and psychological warfare. And while the subjugation is consistent among all the participants in the study, how that is shaped is largely based on the intersections of their identities which could vary based upon gender, marital status, age, socio-economic, and parental status (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; West, 1999). It is important that the ways in which doctoral students understand and respond to psychological warfare (psychological violence, fear, isolation and tokenism) cannot be placed in an either/or dichotomy; meaning that this process is either good or bad depending on the context (West, 1999). Participant ways of knowing were further complicated because they not only have language to articulate the psychological warfare that they are experiencing, and there is a recognition that they can be supported and oppressed by the same individuals who oppress the

actors within the same system that oppressed them; but they displayed no crisis of identity, or suffered from self-blaming like some existing racial taxonomies, which suggest that these are typical responses to coping with the intransience of racism (Felder & Barker, 2013; Mellor, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012; West, 1999).

Participants in the study were able to adjust to their particular surroundings because they utilized their ways of knowing—academic consciousness—to understand and tend to the politics (i.e. respectability, strategic maneuvering) that became associated with their differences (Dubois, 1903; Mellor, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012; West, 1999). Academic consciousness for the participants in this study is a permanent antecedent condition, which means it triggers African-American doctoral students to develop tools for survival within the academy.

Developing tools for survival

The third conclusion that can be drawn from the previous analysis, as represented by African-American doctoral students in this study, is that they seem to devise existential strategies to combat the psychological warfare that they are experiencing (Griffin, 2006; Truong & Museus, 2012). This inquiry supports the extant literature describing coping mechanisms that African American use (creating and fostering Black peer groups, participant reflection, addressing racialized issues) in response to oppression within doctoral programs (Ellis, 2001; Gildersleeve, 2011; Gay, 2007; Gardner, 2007; Griffin, 2006; Mellor, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012). These survival strategies for coping with onslaught oppression, as accented by my participants, represent their tools for survival.

Congruent with the literature, the participants in the study have made choices to survive within their perceived oppressive systems by addressing racial issues (Gardner, 2007; Gay, 2007; Golde, 2000, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Some participants in the study have switched academic

programs and departments, changed advisors, restructured dissertation defense committee members in an effort to remove themselves from environments in were particularly racially hostile and violent. These direct responses to psychological warfare allowed students to align themselves with individuals and programs that they felt complemented their research agendas, were more welcoming to African-American students, or were more likely to help them achieve their academic goals (Lovitts, 2001; Mellon, 2004; Troung & Museus, 2012). For those participants that made these changes, there were public reasons and private reasons for their departure, and usually the public reasons given were not racially motivated, as the participants were not always completely forthcoming with faculty advisors and committee members for changes due to the political nature of doctoral study. Just as in the literature, there may be occasions when doctoral students are concerned about how they will be negatively impacted by making advisor changes (Fountain, 2008; Gasman et al., 2004; Lovitts, 2001). Just as in the literature, other ways participants responded directly to the elements of psychological warfare was to address racism through critiques in media outlets, writing journal articles or by addressing the perpetrator(s) through private conversation or public discourse (Mellon, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012).

The slight departure from the extant literature on African-American doctoral socialization strategies is that the students in this study utilized academic consciousness and code-switching to maneuver and advance within predominantly White spaces. These findings are aligned with existing research by Truong & Museus (2012), who examined coping mechanisms for students of color experiencing trauma in doctoral programs. However, I claim racial trauma, while existing in academia, is a symptom of the psychological warfare that doctoral students subsequently endure during their academic careers.

Findings from this study are consistent with a previous finding that African-American doctoral students rely on same-race peer support as a coping mechanism for negotiating racial trauma (Mellor, 2004; Truong & Museus, 2012). Just as Gildersleeve et al. in their 2011 study found that peer support networks developed and used by African-American students were not departmental or designed efforts but rather were self-initiated interventions into the normative practices of doctoral education, this study also featured student-created writing groups that served as a mental, emotional, and academic support system for many of the participants. In fact, the participants used these groups as a means to not only combat the often racist encounters occurring on a daily basis, but also as a way to strengthen their academic prowess.

Pursuing and employing peer support systems can be unearthed in both in the literature on coping with racism (Ballard & Cintrón, 2010; Gay, 2007; Lewis et al., 2004; Mellor, 2004; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tatum, 1997; Truong & Museus, 2012) as well as in the general literature on sense of belonging (Lee & Robbins, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Longfield, Roma & Irwin, 2006; Uqdah et al., 2009), as students serve as role models and mentors to their peers. More specifically, utilizing peer support integrates the tenets of African-American psychology, which centers collectivism and collective identities (Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012). These accounts help us to understand how those affected by racism make sense of the world around them. Specifically, the literature highlights how individuals perceive racism as unjust and how individuals can use their knowledge and skills in tandem with their peers to deal with racism and oppression (Gay, 2007; Tatum, 1997). It is clear that African-American doctoral students may utilize a variety of tools for survival in response to the symptoms of psychological warfare, which vary depending on context. Moreover, doctoral students' experience of academic consciousness depend on their

coping mechanisms, levels of self-efficacy, and belonging as full-fledged members of the institution.

Conclusion

This study uses the racialized experiences of nine African-American dissertating doctoral students to call into question the system in which perpetuates psychological warfare which promotes gaslighting and institutes a pedagogy of fear—especially when these phenomena are challenged. It is less about the individual actors (students and faculty) who simultaneously rail against and sustain the oppressive system we call academia. We must acknowledge the duality that exists within academe (meaning), that we cannot dismantle the system from within the system because we benefit from it, sustain it, and perpetuate it at the same time. We can, however, interrupt the usual cycles of violence that exists within academia and especially at predominantly White institutions such as the one in which the study was based.

Implications

This study names psychological warfare as a phenomena that exists within academe. The conditions and environments within which many African-American doctoral students currently participate can be exceedingly psychologically violent, fearful, and isolating. The implications for this study are both individual and structural. However, I hope that the findings and suggestions I offer from the study can tackle how, from the perspective of race, African-American doctoral students experience a predominantly White institution. While this study focuses on the experiences of nine doctoral candidates, it is not meant to be generalizable, but the lessons learned here can be transferrable to other students of color who may be experiencing psychological warfare at predominantly white institutions. Moreover, the implications outlined for practice can help institutions in interrupting the usual cycles of violence by taking actions that emotionally, physically, and financially support the persistence and success of African-American doctoral students.

There are ways in which individual actors within the system can move to interrupt the cycles of violence that exist within the academy. First, the participants in the study disrupt the culture of silence by writing about and naming the violence that they experienced in media outlets and in journals. Once a doctoral student graduates, if that individual remains within the academy, they can move into the position of ombudsperson, administrator, faculty member, policymaker, or funder which in turn they may be able to leverage their positions to hire critical faculty to support the research agendas for African-American doctoral students. While faculty of color mentoring has been used as a strategy to advance and socialize African American doctoral students, finding good mentors—ones who are willing to take an oppositional stance to disrupt systems of violence is difficult because once violence has entered into a space, it becomes challenging to remove.

Second, current administrators and policymakers who serve as institutional actors could make paradigmatic changes to create inclusive policies and practices to interrupt systems of violence. These shifts could include institutions moving away from incremental progress (that is, focusing on meeting diversity quotas as counting toward equity; see Brooks & Arnold, 2013) and move toward complete equity-minded cultural shifts that include equity-minded transformations (meaning, deepening commitments to equity through inquiry and practitioner knowledge; justice as fairness—equal distribution of resources among equals and providing greater distribution to racially marginalized students; enacting justice as care—freedom from oppression, see Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). It is important that predominantly white institutions engage in the practice of transparency and they begin to engage in institutionalized racial agency—acknowledging our history and legacy of slavery and racial oppression, sharing a responsibility to tackle racialized inequity, transforming institutional processes which perpetuate fear and violence (i.e. tenure).

This study implies that due to the psychological warfare experienced by participants that African Americans may choose to remove themselves from the academy altogether. This would suggest that the already limited number of African American doctoral students represented in the faculty pipeline would decrease, and the talented and often gifted scholars that enter into academe will eventually move into other labor markets.

Lastly, there are health implications in experiencing psychological warfare within the academy. African American doctoral students may be suffering from undiagnosed conditions, or other wellness issues because their conditions are magnified due to the emotionally, and psychologically violent conditions presented within academe. Because there is no medical cure for systemic racism, medical treatment for conditions due to psychological warfare will only mask the conditions in which they are already predisposed. For those students who matriculate into faculty and other leadership positions within the academy—the way in which they conduct their work will be undoubtedly negatively impacted (e.g., racial battle fatigue) and they have the potential to repeat the cycles of violence to which they have been subjected.

Future Research

To expand upon this research, there are opportunities to dissect the experiences of psychological violence and racism among African-American doctoral students who are in various stages of study rather than focus on the unique experiences of doctoral students who have reached candidacy. Also, there are opportunities to broaden the scope to include the experiences of international Black students to further nuance the ways in which psychological violence and fear is perpetuated within the academy for these groups. Lastly, building on my study of the racialized experiences of dissertating doctoral students, it would be interesting to pursue similar research that explores the intersectionality of their identities as they relate to the

cycles of violence perpetuated with academic spaces and see if the ways in which double consciousness and racial agency are experienced differently.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: How are African-American doctoral students experiencing graduate school?

Principal Investigator: Clifton Conrad (phone: 608.263.3411)
(email: conrad@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Deniece Dortch (phone: 616.990.5467)(email: dortch@wisc.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about the African-American doctoral students engaged in graduate study at predominantly white institutions.

You have been asked to participate because you have been identified as an African-American doctoral student that is currently enrolled in a graduate school at a predominantly white institution.

The purpose of the research is to learn about how African-American doctoral students are experiencing graduate school at predominantly white institutions so that administrators and faculty can create policies and procedures that will aid in their success as scholars.

This study will currently enrolled African-American doctoral students.

The research interviews will be conducted at a location that is convenient for you.

Audiotapes will be made of your participation. The audiotapes will be retained for seven years in a locked file cabinet before they are destroyed.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in a three-part interview process.

Your participation will last approximately 90 minutes per session and will require 3 sessions, which will require 4.5 hour altogether.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

We don't anticipate any risks to you from your participation in this study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

Your participation in this study will help educational organizations and their leaders understand how current African-American doctoral students are experiencing graduate school in an effort to increase persistence and success.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the student researcher Deniece Dortch at 616.990.5467. You may also call the Principal Investigator Clifton Conrad at 608.263.3411.

If you are not satisfied with response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on any services or treatment you are currently receiving.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature _____ Date _____

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

Appendix B

Entry Data

1. For African-American doctoral students currently enrolled in graduate school. How are African-American doctoral students experiencing graduate school at a PWI?

Interview Protocol:

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

*Code Name: _____ *Phone Number: _____

*City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

*Email Address: _____

Program of study: _____

Phase: Coursework Exams /Dissertation Proposal Dissertation

*Gender Identification: Female Male Queer Non-conforming Transgender

*Age: 25 – 30 31 – 35 36 – 40 41-45 46 – 50 51-55 56 – 60

*Marital Status _____

*Children: _____

Appendix C

Opening questions for Interview 1:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. It is so important that others learn what it means to be an African-American doctoral student in the academy and for those in academia to learn more about the experiences of Black scholars in graduate school. This is first ninety-minute interview of a 3-part interview process in which I would like for you to help me to understand ultimately how you as an African-American doctoral student experience graduate school at this predominantly white institution. But in order for me to do that, I would like to first get some historical context about your academic experiences growing up. This first interview is all about your academic life before enrolling here at your current university. This means that, for this first, interview I would like for you to describe your academic experiences in elementary school, middle school and high school. I want to learn about what life was like for you academically, including your relationships with other students, teachers, and administrators from your elementary school until your days as an undergraduate student and continuing on as a master's student. Please include any relationships that you think are relevant to your academic experiences. This will help me to understand your background and your life pre-doctoral study. I am going to be relatively quiet during the interview, I'll interject to ask clarifying questions, but this is your opportunity to help me understand about your academic life growing up.

1. Describe your academic experiences in elementary school.
2. What was middle school and high school like?
3. What were your relationships like with teachers?
4. What were your relationships like with friends?
5. Why did you decide to attend your undergraduate institution? Describe the school environment.
6. When you think about your undergraduate experiences dealing with faculty, and administrators, what were your experiences like?
7. What was life like inside of the classroom at your undergraduate institution?
8. What were your relationships like with peers?
9. Help me understand what life was like for you overall academically?
10. Who were some of the people that helped you to persist along the way and what was your relationship like with those people?
11. Anything that you would like to discuss about your elementary school, high school or undergraduate school experiences that we have yet to discuss.
12. What was your master's program like? (This question only applies to those individuals that did not enroll in doctoral study directly from undergraduate study) Why did you choose your institution and what led you to getting a master's degree.
13. How did you know that you were going to graduate school?
14. Why did you make the decision to attend your current institution?

Appendix D

Thank you for participating in the second part of the three-interview series. Before I begin with explaining the purpose of this second interview, I want to allow space for any thoughts or experiences that you would like to further explain or clarify since the first interview. This interview is all about helping me to understand what your life is like right now as a doctoral student. I am interested in learning about how you experience graduate school currently but am interested in your day-to-day interactions. This would include all the phases of your doctoral school experience to date including anything that has happened since your arrival to your university as a doctoral. It is important that I, and others, learn about your day-to-day experiences that you may have or have had in each phase of the program and how you have experienced program and your school on a daily basis.

1. Describe your current institution. Describe the city in which it is located.
2. How many years have you been enrolled your current program?
3. What phase are you currently in your doctoral process and what are your experiences each day as someone who is in this phase of study?
4. Describe your experiences upon arrival to the institution.
5. Describe your relationships with people on campus.
6. Described how administrators welcomed you.
7. Describe your relationship with your advisor.
8. Describe a typical meeting with your advisor.
9. Is your advisor African American?
10. Describe some challenging experiences that you have had with your advisor?
11. When your advisor is not available, how to you get your academic needs met? Who do your turn to? Describe the racial make-up of the individual(s). Describe your relationship(s).
12. Describe the racialize make-up of your closest academic peers.
13. Describe your relationships with your peers. Are you part of any peer groups, clubs or organizations that are mostly Black? Describe how you have benefitted from being a member?
14. Describe the ways in which you are challenged by your peers.
15. Describe the ways in which your Black peers play a role in this phase of your graduate school experience?
16. As a Black doctoral student, describe your classroom experiences.
17. Was there a time in class when you felt like you were mastering the material?
18. Was there a time in class when you felt like you just didn't understand the material?
19. Can you tell me story about a time in which you felt like you just weren't going to make it?
20. Describe the university environment.
21. If working is a part of your graduate school experience, please describe your position and what you do? Are you the only Black person at your place of employment, and if so, what is that like?
22. Please describe your daily interactions with colleagues.
23. Please describe your daily interactions with supervisors.
24. If research is a part of your graduate school experience, describe how have you been supported or challenged as Black person with your particular research interests?

25. Describe your participation in professional development activities such as research conferences, writing of journal articles, and participation on research teams, etc.
26. Are there any other daily experiences that involve race that you have in which you would like for me to know that haven't been mentioned?

Appendix E

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me again. I have learned much from you and these interviews are useful for helping others understand what life is like for African-American doctoral students. So just to recap our first interview, we delved into your background and understanding what your academic life was like for you pre-doctoral study. Then, in the next interview, you provided for me a series of descriptions that helped provide some insight that described what your day-to-day experiences are as a doctoral student, including [name some of the things from interview]. Now for this last interview, I would like to learn about how you make meaning of your experiences as an African-American doctoral student in graduate school at a predominantly white university. But before we begin, do you have any lingering thoughts or points of clarification that you would like to make from either the first or second interviews [wait for a response]. Okay. Thank you. Lets begin.

1. What does mean to be an African-American scholar on a predominantly white campus?
2. What is like being a Black person on this campus?
3. What does it mean to be an African American scholar in your discipline?
4. Who are some of the scholars that you admire? Do you see yourself in that scholar?
5. What do you think it means to see yourself or not see yourself in the people that you admire?
6. As an African American graduate student, how do you make sense of your relationship with your non-Black advisor/ or Black advisor?
7. What has been your most memorable experience regarding your advisor?
8. How do you make sense of your challenging experiences with your advisor?
9. As a Black doctoral student what is the significance of participating in professional development activities (i.e. attending or/presenting at conferences)
10. As an African American scholar, what is the significance of publishing articles on your own or as part of a group?
11. What does it mean if you haven't participated in these activities at your particular phase of study?
12. How do you make sense of your experiences on campus as someone who identifies as African-American?
13. Do you feel a part of the academic community? Do you feel as though you matter in your department? Are there individuals that have expressed that they care about your development and or success? How is that demonstrated? How do you make sense of that when you are one of few Black individuals in your program?
14. (if applicable) How has being a member of a mostly Black peer group aid in your success? Tell me a story about when they academically helped you, hurt you or both.
15. How are you making sense of your career trajectory? What do you need to do to accomplish your goals beyond achieving a Phd?
16. How does being Black play a role in that experience?
17. As a Black doctoral student, what does getting a Phd mean to you?
18. As you reflect upon your academic journey, how has race shaped your experiences?
19. (only applicable for those nearing the end of their academic process) Do you feel as though your department has properly prepared you to take on the next phase of your academic journey? Do you feel like an expert in your specialization?

