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Supporting African American involvement in a doctoral program at a regional comprehensive university: a research study of the experiences and perceptions of African American current doctoral candidates and African American doctorates

Frankie Nicholson

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**SUPPORTING AFRICAN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN A DOCTORAL
PROGRAM AT A REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITY:
A RESEARCH STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CURRENT DOCTORAL CANDIDATES
AND AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORATES**

by
Frankie Nicholson

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
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Dissertation Chair: Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.

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Frankie Nicholson

Dedication

“If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep going.

If there’s shouting after you, keep going.

Don’t ever stop. Keep going.

If you want a taste of freedom,

KEEP GOING”!!!

(Harriet Tubman, [www. Brainyquote.com](http://www.Brainyquote.com))

Dedicated to my beautiful and intelligent daughter, Timitra Nicole Nicholson

And equally to my

Beautiful and intelligent granddaughter, Ajene Rosemary Nicholson

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I would like to acknowledge Judy Veronica Luster and Willus Luster for their unconditional love, support, and friendship for over fifty years. Thank you for believing in me, your financial support, and your honey do's.

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I would like to acknowledge my mother: Patricia Evelene Nicholson (Miss Pat) and my father: Reverend James Calvin Nicholson, for my life. In addition, I would like to say my niece, Takeya Antoinette Hunt you are the best secretary.

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encouragement needed to be successful. Dr. Gini Doolittle and Dr. Evelyn Browne, you are the best!!! I also would like to acknowledge they are both White females.

Abstract

Frankie Nicholson

SUPPORTING AFRICAN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN A DOCTORAL
PROGRAM AT A REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITY:
A RESEARCH STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS
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AND AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORATES

2011/2012

Gini Doolittle, Ph.D.

Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Education has been the path to battle moral injustice and to encourage self-governing dialogue about doing the “right thing” (Freire, 1998; Fullan, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1999; Tatum, 1992). Fullan (2007) claims that education is the “vehicle” to diminish inequities for the academically disadvantaged. Through interviews and conversations regarding their experiences and perceptions, this research study “gives voice” to African American doctorates, current doctoral students, and doctoral students who chose not to complete the doctoral educational leadership program at a regional comprehensive university in a Mid-Atlantic State (Allen, 1992, 2000; Delgado, 1995; Freeman, 1997; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2000, 2001). Using Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework for analysis, the experiences of participants indicate that academic inequities for candidates seeking terminal degrees continue to exist.

Findings suggest that support systems are needed at predominately White institutions for African American doctoral students to navigate socially and academically (Astin, 1993; Freeman, 1997; Tinto, 1975). The integration of these programs would

enhance the success and retention of African American doctoral students (Freeman, 1997).

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Chapter I

Introduction

Civil Rights changed the demographics at predominately White institutions which did not allow African Americans to access their universities before the 1950s (Brooks, 2004), however, “the concentration of minority doctorate recipients in certain institutions is noticeably greater than for the doctoral population as a whole” (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2007-2008, p.10). African Americans in predominately White institutions who do not have a systemic and sustainable organizational support find it stressful and difficult to succeed in higher education (Blackwell, 1989; Dumas-Hines, 2001). Despite claims that the barriers to equity in education for African Americans at higher education institutions were “torn down” by affirmative action legislation (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddies, & Gonzales, 2000, p. 5), African Americans earning doctorates at historically Black universities and colleges (HBCU) far surpass the completion rate at predominantly White institutions (PWI). Segregation was “unofficially” sustained in the form of state funding for Blacks to pursue their graduate education at HBCUs (Waite & Crocco, 2004, p. 581). It is interesting to note that Howard University, an HBCU, granted the most doctorates to African Americans (334), followed by Nova Southeastern University, a PWI, which awarded 179 terminal degrees to African Americans (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009). In addition, Reddick (2006) states, “historically Black colleges and universities have an impact on African American students who may have never set foot on one of the nation’s 104 designated institutions” (p. 79).

These data suggest that certain characteristics of an HBCU with a significant amount of awarded doctorates may influence the retention and completion rates of

doctoral candidates (Britt & Griffin, 2007). For example, at Howard University, the heart of their retention program for doctoral students begins at enrollment. One-on-one individualized mentoring of fellows begins immediately upon enrollment, followed by monthly prearranged meetings. Doctoral candidates must serve as peer mentors to new graduate students, which is a requirement before they transition as doctoral scholars. Additionally, departments compete for monetary retention/mentoring awards by outlining current initiatives and proposing new initiatives to retention/mentoring programs that are already in place (www.howard.edu).

There is limited research about African American doctoral students' requirements for social and academic interactions at predominately White institutions or the commitment of such institutions to African American students; "more must also be known about what enables Black students to experience personal and academic success" (Allen, 1992, p. 27). Other research studies suggest there is limited involvement of African American doctoral students in developing support programs that engage African American doctoral students to reflect on their experience of social isolation and academic challenges encountered while attending predominately White higher education institutions (Davis, 2007a; Freeman, 1997; Gardner, 2009a). Patton (2004) agrees, "Despite the massive influx of Black students, PWIs were hardly prepared to handle the social, cultural, and academic need of these students" (p. 3).

Fullan (2001) suggests that information and knowledge is a social process, and learning about other cultures is not accomplished in cultures of isolation. Therefore, predominately White institutions may not be organized to cope with the African American culture and persistence for equity in education (Barker, 2007; Berry, 2010).

Nerad and Miller (1996) found that graduate deans in the United States collect and maintain graduate student data “because it will give institutions a better . . . position to monitor the effectiveness of the graduate education process, the quality of their graduate programs, and the outcomes of graduate study” (p. 62). A number of research studies that have focused on the challenges of African American students and their alienation at PWIs due to overt and covert racism (Delgado, 1995; Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) suggests, however, that such data collection does not imply PWIs address culture, persistence, or equity in education (Barker, 2007; Berry, 2010). Gardner and Barnes (2007) state, “efforts on undergraduate persistence, satisfaction, and completion, very few studies have examined the effects of similar interventions and efforts at the graduate level upon these same outcomes” (p. 370). In addition, the limited current research on the outcome of social programs for African American students in higher education suggests positive social experiences are linked to student learning (Hurtado et al., 1999). Therefore, my research on African American doctoral students needs during their tenure at August University in the educational leadership program supports other research studies about African American doctoral students’ educational aspirations to obtain a terminal degree (Barker, 2007; Berry, 2010; Hurtado et al., 1999; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Reddick, 2006).

Fullan (2001) discusses the moral purpose of learning for all students. I conducted a phenomenological research study at a regional comprehensive university to learn how to support doctoral students in an educational leadership program. This study sought to gather information and knowledge of African American doctoral students’ experiences

and perceptions attending predominately White institutions. In addition, the study is a resource for predominately White institutions to review doctoral programs “in order to better understand the phenomenon of graduate student involvement in all of its manifestations” (Gardner, 2007, p. 385), by promulgating the effects of social and academic interactions and/or the lack of social and academic interactions of African American doctoral students enrolled in doctoral programs at predominately White institutions.

Need for the Study

Research on the outcome of social programs for African American students in higher education suggests positive social experiences are linked to student learning (Hurtado et al., 1999), however, there is a scarcity of literature about the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral candidates and some of the literature that is available is nearly a decade old (Kim, 2002; Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996). To support their matriculation at predominately White institutions there is a need for current information and more literature about the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students attending PWIs. The outcomes of my research will begin to fill the gap for scholars to investigate and address the current commitment of support for African American doctoral students’ understanding of what they need to achieve a doctorate (Smith, 1981).

Context of the Study

In the early 1900s August University (a pseudonym) began as a normal school to train teachers for the surrounding area, expanding the curriculum in the mid 1930s to become accredited as a four-year college. Presently, August University has over 11,000

undergraduate and graduate students enrolled. The predominant race of the faculty teaching at August University is White and makes up 75% of the population; 42% of the faculty is female and 58% of the faculty is male (College Statistics, 2011a).

Educational Leadership Program. In 1994, August University established the doctoral program in educational leadership. By the fall of 2008, the university offered 17 online/web assisted courses and 25 face-to-face courses through its College of Professional and Continuing Education (CGCE), either located at the August University campus or at five off campus locations. There are a total of 250 students in CPCE classes, which includes educational leadership doctoral students. In fall of 2009, August began an off campus hybrid cohort extension in an urban area with 42 doctoral candidates in the educational leadership program. According to the university, “the program is designed for practicing educators such as teachers, supervisors, principals, and professionals from related fields...[By providing] opportunities to apply leadership theory to actual workplace problems, the program aims to foster community and provide a peer support network” (College Statistics, 2011b).

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological research study is an attempt to “give voice” to African American doctorates, current doctoral students, and doctoral students who chose not to complete the doctoral educational leadership program at August University, a regional comprehensive university in a Mid-Atlantic State (Allen, 1992, 2000; Delgado, 1995; Freeman, 1997; Solóranzo & Yosso, 2001a, 2001b). This study addressed the need for higher education to create specific areas of support for African Americans who attend a

PWI to fulfill their aspirations of successfully completing a terminal degree (Allen, 1992; Allen et al., 2000; Davis, 2007b; Freeman, 1997; Gardner, 2009b).

Research Questions

The principal research question was, “What are the social and academic experiences of African American doctoral students?” Three additional questions guided the research study:

1. Do social and academic interactions contribute to the success of African American doctoral candidates?
2. What are African American doctoral candidate’s perceptions about support needed to be successful in a doctoral program?
3. How is Critical Race Theory (CRT) useful as a lens to understand African American doctoral candidate’s experiences?

Overview of Methodology

In this research study I investigated the academic and social interactions relating to African American doctoral students attending, or who may have attended, August University. The data sets included individual in-depth interviews, notes on informal conversations, and personal reflections from my leadership journal.

Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), I identified and invited 10 African American doctoral students, who were enrolled in the education leadership program, or were past doctoral students who either completed or left the program before completion. All 10 participants completed an informed consent, and were ensured that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at anytime. All research instruments and procedures were included in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to August University.

I analyzed the data using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to identify key themes regarding participants' experiences as doctoral students at August University. I recorded and took notes of interviews, conversations, and discussions about the educational leadership doctoral program. I constantly compared data using the specific procedures in phenomenological research for generating emergent themes in the doctoral program related to the main research question regarding academic and social interactions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In addition, I maintained a reflective field journal of my own leadership practice throughout the research study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Significance of the Study

This phenomenology will be a resource for higher education institutions to review for existing or future doctoral programs, by identifying the effects of social and academic interactions and/or the lack of social and academic interactions of African American doctoral students enrolled in doctoral programs. The outcomes of my research will begin to fill the gap for scholars to investigate and address the current commitment of support for African American doctoral students' understanding of what they need to achieve a doctorate in educational leadership (Smith, 1981). By exploring why African Americans chose to pursue their terminal degree at a predominately White institution, this study provides insight to support African Americans' aspirations for continuing their educational goals (Dumas-Hines, 2001).

Further study of African Americans' experiences and perceptions at predominately White institutions is suggested by researchers (Allen et al., 2000; Davis,

2007a; Freeman, 1997; Gardner, 2009a; Patton, 2004). Therefore, this phenomenological study is being conducted to benefit faculty and administration, current African American doctoral students, and future African American doctoral students who are considering predominately White Institutions as their choice for a terminal degree.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

In 2009, there were 9,825 African American doctoral graduates out of a total of 49,562 doctorates awarded in the United States (National Science Foundation, 2010). This phenomenological research study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students in an educational leadership program. I include major themes from the literature relevant to the study in this chapter. The first section is a historical review of African Americans gaining access to higher education through the legal assistance of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The second section reviews the role of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) for African Americans seeking educational attainment. This information provides a framework for understanding the supports needed by African Americans to be successful in higher education. The third section focuses on the lack of social and academic supports for African Americans attending predominately White institutions. The fourth section reviews three theories that provide the conceptual framework for analyzing the research study: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Tinto's Theory (1975), and Astin's Theory (1993). Finally, I discuss the literature on leadership and change as they relate to this phenomenological study.

Historical Context

Educational aspiration is the definitive attribute of the African American culture (Allen, 1992; Moore & Toliver, 2010; White & Lowenthal, 2011). African American

trailblazers in higher education have served as pathfinders for future African Americans to persevere through all obstacles with determination, persistence, and courage (Allen, 1992; Moore & Toliver, 2012; White & Lowenthal, 2011). African American scholars emerge from the African American community, because their grandparents, their parents, their church, their aunts and uncles have said individually and in unison, that education is the key to freedom, confidence, wealth, and prestige.

Historical facts can serve as reminders to not repeat the mistakes of the past, or provide directions to improve upon past mistakes that have been made. In addition, historical facts can support change agents to make improvements in leadership (Fullan, 2001). African Americans' aspirations for educational attainment have historical roots. Allen et al. (2000) state, "when slaves were forbidden to learn to read and write under threat of death or physical harm, African Americans have invested education with mythic qualities, holding it up as both hope and salvation for the future" (p. 3). Some African American slaves were taught to read and write in order to convert them to Christianity (Lambert, 2002). "When allowed by a few slaveholders to learn to read, African Americans demonstrated their desire and ability" (p. 14). Reading and writing to African Americans slaves meant they could pass on the skill "without the assistance from Whites" (p. 14). African American cultural belief in educational attainment is instilled as a means to being successful, "achieving greatness" in the African American community, and giving back to the African American community (Allen & Jewel, 1995; Allen et al., 2000). Not all African Americans who were enslaved in the new world were illiterate, however. Some African Americans came to the new world highly educated through the religious teachings of Islam (Diouf, 1999). The African American Muslims "could read

and write Arabic and Ajami (their own languages using the Arabic alphabet), and probably hundreds of thousands among them had pursued higher studies” (p. 124).

Desegregation in education. In the 1920s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began using the courts to fight the segregation law *Plessey vs. Ferguson*, 163 U. S. 537 (1896), which allowed Whites to provide separate but equal facilities in the areas of public transportation, public restrooms, public school, and higher education (Beckman, Beckman, & Ruf, 2004). Thurgood Marshall, Chief Attorney for the NAACP Justice Department, and a team of civil rights attorneys represented cases to the Supreme Court. The intention to change institutionalized racism in higher education through the courts would begin to “rectify the past practices of discrimination and...recruit and select minority students into schools where minorities were historically underrepresented” (Beckman et al., 2004, p. 42). The NAACP suggested that starting with higher education institutions “segregation of separate but equal education” would trickle down to the public schools (Beckman et al., 2004; Stephens, 2004, p. 121).

Segregation cases. There were several segregation cases which involved only higher education institutions that did not allow African Americans to attend their university graduate or law schools (Beckham et al., 2004; Brooks, 2004; Njemanzo, 2004; Steinberg, 2004; Tucker, 2004). Three distinctive cases involved an African American female, Ada Sipuel, who wanted to attend Oklahoma University’s law school; an African American male, George McLaurin, who wanted to attend Oklahoma University graduate school; and James Meredith, who wanted to attend the “flagship” University of Mississippi.

Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Justice Department legal team won Mrs. Ada Louise Sipuel Fisher's case in 1948, and Dr. George McLaurin, a retired African American college professor from Langston University won his case in 1950 (Beckman et al., 2004). Oklahoma University allowed both students to attend their higher education institution; however, Ms. Sipuel's desk was roped off from other students (Oklahoma University, n.d.); Dr. McLaurin's desk was placed outside the classroom. Neither student was allowed to participate in discussions or ask questions (Beckman et al., 2004). Ms. Sipuel was not allowed any contact with other graduate students. In addition, if they attended the library, cafeteria, and stadium, they were cordoned off from the White students (Brooks, 2004; Njemanzo, 2004; Steinberg, 2004; Tucker, 2004). According to Tucker, "In both cases, Thurgood Marshall successfully demonstrated that "separate-but-equal" facilities for African American professional and graduate students in state universities were not in fact "equal" and were, therefore, unconstitutional under then Supreme Court Fourteenth Amendment jurisprudence" (Tucker, 2004, p. 589).

James Meredith wanted to attend the University of Mississippi law school, which led to demonstrations and riots. The attorney general during that time was Robert F. Kennedy, who sent United States Marshalls to protect James Meredith (Meredith, 1966). During the riots in Mississippi two people were killed in the "bloody battle" and 160 United States Marshalls were wounded (Meredith, 1966; Njemanzo, 2004).

James Meredith won his case against the University of Mississippi in 1962 and decided to organize a civil rights march called "March against Fear" (Meredith, 1966). James was shot during the march on June 5, 1966 and was hospitalized for 20 days, but while he was hospitalized Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and Floyd McKissick

continued the protest march in James Meredith's name. James Meredith graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1964.

Affirmative action. Marquita Sykes (1995) states, "Affirmative action, the set of public policies and initiatives designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, is under attack" (p. 1). Kador and Lewis (2007) suggest, since the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision, the United States has still struggled in how welcoming they would be to African American students in its higher education institutions" (p. 100)

Affirmative Action opened doors for African Americans in higher education. Supported by the success of the civil rights cases that were presented in the 1960s, and the brave African Americans that overcame the existing hurdles for their own personal educational aspirations (Allen et al., 2000), African Americans have the opportunity to choose any higher educational institution without barriers in the admissions process or academic course selection (Allen et al., 2000, p. 3).

Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Brown and Davis (2001) write, "Historically Black colleges are products of America's social contract with African Americans. Of the various social institutions in Black communities, historically Black colleges occupy a unique place as a source of social capital for African Americans" (p. 40). Since the post civil war era, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), "have become the primary channel to social mobility and equality for African Americans" (Brown & Davis, 2001, p. 40). Rodgers and Summers (2008) agree with Brown and Davis (2001) when the authors insist that predominately White institutions "have not been as effective in supporting and

consequently retaining, Black students, especially when compared to predominately Black institutions” (p. 172). There are currently 103 HBCUs, and a majority of all African American doctoral candidates graduate from a historically Black college (NCES, 2007; Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2007-2008). In addition, HBCUs employ the most “full-time African American professors, executives, administrators, and managers” (Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Milem, 2007, p. 224).

Howard University, a historically Black college in Washington, D.C., graduated 338 African American doctoral students in 2009; this is the leading higher education institute for African American doctorates in the United States (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009). “An act of Congress (S529) established Howard University a comprehensive, research-oriented, predominately African American University... comprised of 12 schools and colleges offering degree programs in more than 120 specialized subjects and doctorates in more than 25 areas” (Dyson, 1941). In addition, Howard University graduates the most African Americans doctorates in Physical Science and Engineering (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009). HBCUs take pride in their “special mission” to enroll students that otherwise would not be accepted and/or would not be successful on predominately White campuses (Allen, 1992; Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan, 2010).

In 2006 historically Black colleges and universities awarded 376 doctorates to recipients of all races (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2008). Historically Black colleges are aware of the support and remediation needed to retain African Americans when they experience academic challenges in higher education (Sutherland, 2011). Hurtado (2007) reports that HBCUs have institutionalized structures that support the

advancement of African American people. The types of normative institutionalized structures, which include peer and faculty ongoing mentoring, are made between African American faculty and administration with African American students and accepted as part of the social infrastructure at HBCUs (Hurtado, 2007). These institutionalized structures perhaps suggest faculty “wanting to make a difference in students’ lives” and lead “to a variety of behaviors in which faculty and staff engage” academically (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011, p. 328). In addition, African American graduates from HBCUs give back to other African Americans who want to be successful in higher education; they “view their work as mentors for African Americans...as social responsibility to the African American community” (Reddick, 2006, p. 3). Schreiner et al. (2011) list five behaviors from faculty that make a difference:

Encouraging, supporting, and believing in them; motivating them and wanting to see them learn; taking time for them, expressing an interest in them; and communicating to them that they are important; relating to them on their level; and pushing them to excel while at the same time helping them to understand difficult concepts. (p. 328)

Historically Black institutions are the primary higher education institutions to which African American doctoral students apply, because “these institutions admitted students whose educational backgrounds or economic circumstances prevented them from attending other institutions” (Coaxum, 2001, p. 580). In addition, “these institutions graduate a higher proportion of Black students and have granted a disproportionate number of degrees to Blacks than any other segment of higher education” (Coaxum, 2001, p. 581).

There is limited research on why African Americans choose historically Black colleges over predominately White institutions (Freeman, 1997; Van Camp et al., 2010).

Hurtado (2007) insists, “More research is needed to understand the conditions under which historically underrepresented students fare best, including a careful assessment of the climate as a mediating process in the achievement of desired outcomes for students” (p. 188).

African American Experiences in Predominately White Colleges and Universities

Hurtado (2007) states that “while HBCUs have institutional normative structures that support the advancement of African American people, it is incorrect to uniformly conclude that education in predominately White institutions is harmful to Black students” (p. 188). African Americans seek educational attainment at predominately White universities because, as Chang (1999) states, “higher education has been regarded as an increasingly important pathway to economic and social well-being” (p. 45). Hurtado (2007) suggests that “substantial and meaningful” social and academic interactions affect learning and “democratic sensibilities” (p. 190). Hurtado (2007) defines democratic sensibilities as “democratic multicultural societies that endorse ...justice and equality, support and defend them when faced with practices that violate these ideals” (p. 190).

Social and academic support. Kozol (2005) and Allen (1992) attribute the rising cost of higher education as one of the many reasons why predominately White institutions are limited in what kind of social and academic activities they can offer to African American doctoral students. Kozol (2005) insists, “As racial isolation deepens and the inequalities of education finance remain unabated and take on new and more innovative forms” (p. 2005) educational institutions have to make choices in the limited resources provided. Allen (1992) suggests, “a period of boundless expansion and optimism has moved into one of retrenchment and financial constraints, which is

reflected in a dilution of higher education's commitment to Blacks and other minorities" (p. 27).

Educational attainment at PWIs offers insufficient support in social and academic interactions for African Americans (Chang, 1999; Felder, 2010; Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b; Tatum, 2000). Payton, White, and Mbarika (2006) espouse the reason for "heightened degrees of isolation, rejection, and discrimination" from both the dominant culture and the African American culture involve social and academic interactions as a cause for African American doctoral students' lack of positive experiences at PWIs. Social conflict may arise when African American doctoral students try to assimilate into the "dominant culture...[and experience] academic politics that can be detrimental to the survival of minorities in the academy" (Payton et al., p. 195). However, Tatum (2000) acknowledges, "stressful experiences can happen at any college and social conflict can and do erupt among Black students at Black colleges as well" (p. 79).

Uqdah, Tyler, and DeLoach (2009) concluded a study of African American graduate students that organizing social interactions intertwined with academic information, which he called, "leisure instruction," decreased feelings of alienation and contributed to the success of African American graduates in the program (p. 34). Davis (2007a) agrees when she writes, "professional interaction, as well as similar research and personal interests, predict a quality mentoring relationship" (p. 219). For example, "Informal discussions with faculty members about intellectual issues are associated with increases in students' aspiration to achieve at a higher level than would be predicted by pre-enrollment characteristics" (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 334).

However, Payton et al. (2006) suggest professors have a “challenge of where and how to allocate time” (p. 194) especially for minority doctoral students. Research suggests everyone benefits from social and academic interactions at higher education institutions, because they develop the democratic sensibilities of the entire institutional learning environment (Hurtado, 2007; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Tinto, 1975), however, Schreiner et al. (2011) caution “the type of behaviors and attitudes exhibited by faculty or staff that help high-risk students succeed may differ according to institutional type” (p. 331).

Tinto (1975) suggests that access to faculty outside of the classroom will increase African Americans students’ persistence, and along with informal interactions with students, will increase retention in higher education. Hurtado (2007) claims that higher education must continue to improve initiatives for African Americans who attend predominately White institutions so they can successfully complete academic programs. In addition, Komarraju et al. (2010) state, “Student-faculty interactions can be crucial in developing students’ academic self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement” (p. 332). The importance of faculty as leaders to be open-minded and accessible to doctoral students, demonstrates “respect” for the doctoral students aspiration of becoming a doctor of education (Komarraju et al., 2010, p. 332).

Predominately White institutions’ “interactional activities” for diverse students are important to academic success, critical thinking, social justice, and especially preparing all students for a global community (Hu & Kuh, 2003, p. 321). Social and academic interactions are important for retention of African American doctoral students (Astin, 1993; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado et al., 1999; Tinto, 1975),

as African Americans are usually the first generation to attend graduate school, so there is no knowledgeable family surrounding the doctoral student that understands the isolation, frustration, and the demands of pursuing the terminal degree (Allen, 1992; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Isaac, 1998). In addition, African American doctoral students may have “lacked access to curricula that challenge” them to achieve, which would have encouraged them to prepare for the rigors of higher education (Doolittle & Browne, 2011, p. 293). Isaac (1998) states, “though our parents and siblings may have been extremely proud of us, they could not offer the technical advice and field of study wisdom on how to maneuver through graduate school” (p. 34).

Supporting diversity. Racial microaggressions are nothing new for African Americans who face this reality in any genre for example, in the workplace, on the street, where they live, and at school (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). “Microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60). This form of racism has its effects over time. “Racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have real consequences, African American students’ struggle with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 69).

According to Astin (1993), higher education must focus on educational outcomes that emphasize “diversity issues” and the institute would benefit from values taught and learned by students (p. 6). Supporting diversity does not mean just having minorities attend predominately White institutions. Supporting diverse students on campus means promoting “positive cross –racial interactions among college students” (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007, p. 2). Moore and Toliver (2010) propose that universities:

Create a climate for candid campus discussions about race that permeate faculty-student communication through student-centered programs, as well as individual communication between ... advisors or mentors in which concerns about race can be continually explored and proactively addressed whenever problematic. (p. 939)

Aronin and Singleton (2010) suggest that the “diversity of language” (p. 107) has an effect on educational attainment. They discuss the “concept of affordances” where “the emphasis is on social coordination and social interaction in the acquisition of knowledge and behavior competencies and on the importance of culture practices” (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 114). Aronin and Singleton’s theory of “affordance” and how it relates to education attainment is an example of “a classification that provides useful tools for monitoring the dynamics of language diversity” (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 125). White and Lowenthal (2011) discuss the differences of growing up with parents and/or being influenced by mentors who have been in an college environment which would provided some dialogue on the preparation for “university’s tacit rules and linguistic codes” (p. 294).

Mentor and/or Advisor for African American Doctoral Students

Schreiner et al. (2011) suggest that, “mentors...enhanced students’ self-confidence in their ability to succeed, stressed the importance of education as the only path to success in life, and found ways to bring the college and the student together so that success was possible” (p. 322). Brittian, Sy, and Stokes (2009) observe that, “there has been very little work done around university-based mentoring programs” (p. 88). Mentor/advisor is defined as “an interpersonal exchange between an experienced senior colleague (mentor) and a less experienced junior colleague (protégé) in which the mentor provides the protégé with career functions related to career advancement and

psychosocial functions related to personal development” (Kram as cited in Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008, p. 727). This definition of mentor and/or advisor corresponds to the average age and professional representation of the doctoral student enrolled in the educational leadership program (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009).

There is a recurring argument that predominately White institutions are not adequately prepared to support African Americans attending their institutions (Kador & Lewis, 2007; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Nevertheless, it is important African American doctoral students have a mentor/advisor that makes a connection early on in the doctoral program (Kador & Lewis, 2007). Kador and Lewis suggest that the mentor or advisor have “support structures...essential to how it relates to the needs of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus” (Kador & Lewis, 2007, p. 100). Any initial support for the prospective African American doctoral student should not deviate from an authentic academic or social environment of the predominately White university (Kador & Lewis, 2007; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004). Gardner and Barnes (2007) conducted a phenomenology research study of higher education doctoral students that included 10 doctoral students from different demographic and cultural backgrounds. The research study revealed the benefit and “recognized the importance of involvement to their professional goals and success in their future careers” (p. 382).

African American Mentors

Moore and Toliver (2010) suggest that “Black faculty members’ and students’ shared experiences of racism and prejudicial attitudes... support the observation that Black students fare better in traditionally White colleges and universities when they see professors with whom they can identify” (p. 932). African American doctoral students

gravitate toward African American professors, because they believe that the professors share past history and the African American culture (Moore & Toliver, 2010). African American students also tend to believe that African American professors have had similar experiences with credibility, language, and communication in undertaking and achieving their success (Moore & Toliver, 2010).

In making a case for the presence of additional African American faculty, Lewis et al. (2004) state that, “that most powerful predictor of enrollment and graduation of African-American students at a professional school was the presence of an African American faculty member serving as the student’s mentor” (p. 233). Moore and Toliver (2010) conducted a pilot study with a focus group of 10 Black professors from two predominately White universities concerning the “interracial dynamics of Black professors’ and Black students’ communication in traditionally White colleges and universities” (p. 932), which allowed the Black professors to express their experiences and perceptions of the predominately White universities’ attitudes toward communicating with African American students. Moore and Toliver (2010) conclude that, “a critical mass of Black students and faculty members is needed to help ensure the success of Black students, as well as faculty members” (p. 44). Nevertheless, other research shows, “a faculty member who is genuinely interested in a doctoral student’s research agenda, professional development and degree completion can be important to an African American’s degree completion regardless of race” (Davis, 2007b, p. 358). Furthermore, in a study involving African American graduate students, Davis (2007a) found,

The majority of participants had positive mentoring experiences regardless of the mentor’s race, students with non-White mentors expressed higher levels of inspiration and engagement in these relationships. The strength of same-race mentoring dyads suggests the importance of validation in the academic

socialization process, yet does not minimize the importance of cross-race mentoring given the demographics of academe. (Davis, 2007a, p. 227)

Nevertheless, new research has become apparent to predominately White universities and African American students that perhaps “Black professors need to clarify course expectations for students in general and, particularly, to communicate to Black students that they will be held to the same standards as other students” (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 937). Clearly communicating academic expectations becomes vital to African American students whose family may not be aware and/or unable of the kind of support needed to succeed in a doctoral program because, “neither parent had been awarded a college degree” (Gardner, 2009a). With or without institutional support, that “Blacks earned more doctorates in education than any other minority group” despite the fact that “the parents of underrepresented minority doctorate recipients have lower rates of educational attainment than do the parents of Asian and White doctorate recipients” (National Science Foundation, 2010) is some indicator of the persistence of African Americans in doctoral programs.

University Based Support Programs

The University of California at Berkley created and implemented a three prong approach to “increase student retention” (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 71). The first prong: Institutional policies and strategies, which monitor the progress of doctoral students. The greatest resource the first prong provides is communication and collaboration for all stakeholders, for example, the dean conducts a half-day visit in which he or she talks to students and faculty, presents current data demonstrating improvement or non-improvement, and requests a justification if no improvement is indicated. In addition, the

first prong includes, a first-year evaluation, annual report on progress in candidacy, and a financial support structure.

The second prong: Working with departments, includes advising and mentoring, which substantiates the research provided in this research study on advising and mentoring as the key components in a successful graduate program. Nerad and Miller (1996) suggest that there is a difference between an advisor and a mentor. “The advisor is responsible for assisting students in selecting programs of study and for making sure that students make adequate progress toward the degree and fulfill all university requirements” (p. 72). Hall and Sandler (1983) define a mentor as,

A person who helps the protégé set goals and standards and develops skill; protects the protégé from others to allow room for risk and failure; facilitates a successful entrance into academic and professional circles; and ultimately passes on his or her work to the protégé. (Hall & Sandler, as cited in Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 73)

Nerad suggests that informal mentoring, “Like friendship, this kind of mentoring cannot be forced upon students and faculty” (Nerad, 1995 in Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 73). In contrast, Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) state, “research-focused relationships are superior to informal personal mentoring affiliations in terms of students’ satisfaction with college” (p. 79). Whether it is formal or informal, support in the form of advisor or mentor “affects persistence and retention” of African Americans to “the extent to which students feel involved in or connected to the academic and social realms of college life” (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007, p.73). The second prong also includes department staff support, where, “two graduate division staff members meet monthly with a group of approximately fifteen graduate assistants from a representative variety of compass

departments” (p. 73). In addition, easing the way, which creates “departmental activities that supported students at various stages of their doctoral program” (p. 73).

The third prong: Working with students. This prong includes orientation programs, grant proposal writing workshops, dissertation writing workshops, interdisciplinary research retreats, which the “three-day, off campus workshops bring together students who are working on similar themes but who are in different departments and do not know each other” (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 74). In addition, the interdisciplinary research retreats will:

Help break the sense of isolation that so often attends the dissertation writing experience, precipitate the formation of a cross-disciplinary intellectual community that endures beyond the workshop, and provide fresh impetus for completing work that students may have begun to think irrelevant or doomed to failure. (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 74)

The third prong continues with abstracts of dissertation in-progress, publications, which would “make the graduate education process as transparent as possible” and academic job search assistance, which would support doctoral students near completion of their terminal degree (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 74). This assistance would encompass, “tailoring general campus job placement workshops to their students’ needs, and to organize sessions in which faculty are available to help students prepare for job market and think about the next job” (p. 75). Nerad and Miller (1996) state in their research study, “Increasing student retention in graduate and professional programs,” that universities “needed to improve retention rates; unfortunately, most hope to do this by improving the admissions process only” (p. 66).

Pontius and Harper (2006) identified “seven principles for good practice in graduate student engagement” (p. 52). Pontius and Harper (2006) suggest that university programs:

1. Continually strive to eradicate marginalization among underrepresented populations – efforts should be made to identify agents, both on campus and externally, who can offer culturally responsive support and advising to these students, especially those from smaller racially homogeneous groups (p. 52);
2. Provide meaningful orientation to the institution beyond academic units – A well-conceived university-wide orientation introduces graduate and professional students to resources beyond their academic programs and departments, including campus offices, student organization, and support outlets for underrepresented (p. 53);
3. Invest resources in communication with graduate and professional students – good practice in graduate student engagement hinges on the timely distribution of important materials, announcements, and information to students (p. 53);
4. Facilitate opportunities for community building and multicultural interaction across academic units – “presence and availability of vibrant communities of difference confirm for students that they have networks of culturally diverse peers on whom they can rely for support, friendship, and value-added learning experiences beyond the classroom” (p. 53).
5. Partner with academic schools and departments to create engagement plans for students – “Each stakeholder recognizes that the extent to which graduate

and professional students are engaged in educationally purposeful experiences should not occur by happenstance” (p. 54);

6. Enhance career and professional development - “effective career development centers expand their foci to include more outreach, workshops, services, counseling and career fairs for graduate and professional students” (p. 54);
7. Systematically assess satisfaction, needs, and outcomes – “assessments of how students change, what they learn outside the classroom, and the various ways in which they apply what they have learned through enriching educational experiences are deemed important and worthy of investigation” and “findings shape future programming and interventions” (p. 54).

Conceptual Framework

In order to understand the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this qualitative study in relation to the themes identified in the literature review, it is useful to rely on a conceptual framework (Creswell, 2007). The conceptual framework for this study includes three theories that apply to student retention, engagement, and support: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Tinto’s theory (1975), and Astin’s theory (1993). In particular, CRT provides more depth to the perceptions of African American doctoral students’ needs during their enrollment in the educational leadership program at August University.

Critical Race Theory. African Americans are a marginal race according to the critical race theory, which was developed in the early 1970s to describe covert and overt racism toward African Americans in education, housing, economics, and workplace (Aguirre, 2004; Allen, 1992; Allen et al., 2000; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

“Critical race theory refers to a framework used to examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly shape social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2006, p. 4). Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s when affirmative action failed to mitigate racial injustice for minorities in law, education, and the workplace (Allen, 1992).

Barbara Trepagnier (2001) defines “silent racism” as “negative thoughts and attitudes regarding African Americans and other people of color on the part of White people, including those who see themselves and are generally seen by others as not racist” (p. 141). “Silent racism” theory aligns with Feagin and Feagin’s, (1994) theory of “indirect institutional racism” (Feagin & Feagin, 1994; Trepagnier, 2001).

Universities tout the diversity of their student bodies, but the desegregation of schools does not necessarily lead to the integration of students’ social networks ... almost all intra-school universities tout their diversity, but few studies have examined intra-school segregation in higher education. (Lewis, 2008, p. 2)

In addition, Nettles (2000) suggests, “themes that unify...programs of research is the importance of supportive relationships and contents in the academic experiences of students placed at risk” (p. 49).

Ballard (2010) states, “The application of critical race theory (CRT) to research in education has increased since the 1990s” (p. 14). Richard Delgado (1995) used critical race theory extensively to hypothesize why African American stories are important to use as a frame of reference for higher education. Delgado (1995) suggests “A different frame of reference provides a unique conceptual understanding that gives voice to an experience dissimilar from the dominant culture and deserves to be heard” (p. 14). Similarly, Solórzano et al. (2000) state, “Qualitative scholars use critical race theory to highlight individual experiences and the voices through which those experiences are told by

providing thick descriptions of students' stories related to campus environments and college experiences" (p. 60). Critical race theory is used in this phenomenological research study primarily as a way to signify and embody the importance of African American doctoral students' concerns in the educational doctoral program (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009). According to Diggs et al. (2009), critical race theory "can introduce voices and experiences that are traditionally unrepresented in education literature" (p. 329).

Brittian et al. (2009) argue that "acculturative stress" may be attributed to retaining African American students at predominately White institutions. The researchers' description of "acculturative stress" begins with "the belief that a person must assimilate to the majority culture, while abandoning the values and traditions of his or her own culture" (Brittian et al., 2009, p. 87). This disconnection suggests, "it is especially difficult for African American students at predominantly White universities to find a strong social support network" (Brittian et al., 2009, p. 88). Identifying the experiences and perceptions that may have been trivialized or limiting for African American students at a regional comprehensive university provides information to make transformational changes (Ballard, 2010).

Tinto's Theory. Tinto (1993) theory of college retention, "identifies three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution" (p. 89). Tinto's theory of integration suggests that there are two central ideas that prevent African American

students from dropping out in higher education: “academic and social integration” (Tinto, 1975; Yosso, 2006).

As indicated in Tinto’s theory (1975, 1993), personal contact with academic professors, higher education administration, and personal development are key to success and retention in higher education. Schreiner et al. (2011) interviewed high-risk college students and asked what was needed from faculty members. A few of the items articulated in the interviews were: “put a balance of positive and negative comments on their papers and return them on time; answer their e-mails and phone calls as soon as you can; and make their education connect to who they are as a person” (p. 330). There is limited research involving “student-faculty interaction...high-risk students specifically” (Kuh & Hu, 2001, p. 322).

Astin’s Theory. Astin’s (1993) theory of student involvement “reflects the amount of physical and psychological time and energy the student invests in the educational process” (p. 2). In fact, there is a connection linking academic and social interactions of enrolled African American doctoral students’ “isolation and devaluation” in a doctoral program at a large predominately White institution (Uqdah et al., 2009, p. 24). In making this comment, Uqdah et al. (2009) also argue that, “there is little quantitative evidence highlighting the personal/psychological and interpersonal/social factors lined to academic success and psychological well-being for Black graduate students in doctoral programs” (p. 24). Doctoral students’ aspiration to continue to pursue a terminal degree is evidence of their commitment to invest physically and psychologically in a doctoral program (Ballard, 2010; Brazziel & Brazziel 1987). Astin (1993) suggests, “student-to-student interaction has its strongest positive effects on

leadership development” (p. 3). Gardner’s (2010) research study involving “faculty perspectives on doctoral students’ socialization in five disciplines” (p. 39) concedes that “the majority of faculty members held more than a naïve conceptualization of their influence in the socialization process” (p. 46).

The Role of Leadership in Educational Change

Fullan (2007) suggests that education is the “vehicle” to diminish inequities for the academically disadvantaged. In addition, Fullan (2007), Tatum (1992), and Hurtado (2007) agree that not much progress has been made since the civil rights cases that focused on education in the 1960s. Restructuring and transforming educational institutions to make them accountable for progress is still difficult when to “the intrinsic complexity of changing one’s practice was added the enormous difficulty of tackling the existing power structure and overcoming the prejudice and ignorance of ethnic, class, gender, and special differences of all kinds” (Fullan, 2007, p. 6).

Education has been the path to battle moral injustice and to encourage self-governing dialogue about doing the “right thing” (Freire, 1998; Fullan, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1999; Tatum, 1992), however, O’Connor, Lewis, and Mueller (2007) discuss how race has been “undertheorized on the educational experiences and outcomes of Blacks” (p. 541). Predominately White institutions have fallen short in “understanding, tracking racial inequalities, and charting progress on a range of social outcomes” (p. 542).

In addressing the role of leadership in “meaning making” (Saddler, 2005, p. 53) and “putting theory into practice” (O’Connor et al., 2007, p. 542), so that African American doctoral students can interpret, communicate, and produce well written assignments, there needs to be a transformational change in the educational leadership

doctoral program structure (Reddick, 2006; Saddler, 2005; O'Connor et al., 2007). August university's educational leadership doctoral program offers leadership courses accompanied with prominent theoretical authors, but some professors, "overlook the extent to which Blackness is reflected not only in the meanings students bring with them to school but also in the meanings that are imposed on them by school structures" (p. 542). Doolittle, Stanwood, and Simmerman (2006) emphasize "the importance of a collaborative learning community within an educational leadership program to enhance learning experiences" (p. 12). African American doctoral students who enter a doctoral program may have added pressure to adapt quickly to this social and academic environment (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2010).

Empathy has a role in leadership in education, and education is connected to experience (Dewey, 1938; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). My role as a researcher in this study has given me an opportunity to practice empathy while engaged in interviews and conversations with participants, and to witness first-hand the difference between espousing leadership and experiencing leadership. In theory, being engaged in an educational leadership program suggests gaining a practical understanding of the change and transformation that are a potential outcome of a shared vision.

Burns (2003) defines transformational leadership as "leadership that occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 24 & 25). In order for change to be sustainable everyone involved in the organizational change must understand the vision and purpose for change (Wheatley, 2005). It is necessary that leaders and followers have an ongoing awareness of what grounds them and what they are passionate

about so they can make solid decisions quickly in a crisis (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Goleman et al., 2002).

Goleman et al. (2002) suggest that emotional intelligence is the primary source for an effective leader, because the leader has a “sense of what matters most” (p. 41). Bolman and Deal (2003) agree with Goleman et al. that emotional intelligence along with social skills is essential characteristics of an effective leader. The power of an emotionally intelligent leader can challenge organizational issues that are in need of change, especially during the initial implementation period of organizational change (Goleman et al., 2002; Wheatley, 2005).

The transformational leader recognizes that the global community in the 21st century shares experiences and perceptions instantaneously through the information highway (Stephens, 2009). The consequences of not differentiating in handling situations might have adverse effects on “integrating the different subcultures” in an organization (Schein, 2004, p. 289). Schein (2004) suggests two ways one can change organizational culture through leadership: to “imitate the role model or keep inventing solutions until something works” (p. 327). For example, Howard University, a historically Black college, has produced the majority of African American doctorates (NCES, 2007; SED, 2007-08). Howard University has a number of retention and support programs that have assisted African American doctoral students academically (NCES, 2007; Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2007- 08), and “...has a mission to provide an educational experience of exceptional quality to students, with particular emphasis on education opportunities for promising Black students,...[and to] attract and sustain...faculty who are committed to the development of distinguished and compassionate graduates”

(LaPoint & Thomas, 2006, p. 175). In addition, Schein's (2004) second suggestion for changing an organization – of persisting until finding something that works – supports the argument that perhaps “learners...are adults who may have to unlearn something before they can learn something new” (p. 105).

As an educational leader I have set the example and focused on the “hopes, and aspirations of people in the organization” that I am leading. As a “role model whose behaviors, actions and personal energy demonstrate the desired behavior expected” (Wren, 2004, p. 110), I would like to see replicated in the people who look to me as a leader.

Conclusion

Social and academic interactions are important to the retention of African American doctoral students (Astin, 1993; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado et al., 1999; Tinto, 1975). Predominately White institutions “interactional activities” for diverse students are important to academic success, critical thinking, social justice, and especially preparing all students for a global community (Hu & Kuh, 2003, p. 321).

Valerie A. Lewis (2012) conducted interviews regarding “Social Energy and Racial Segregation in the University Context,” and found that “Blacks and Hispanics are particularly segregated...[and] that these students spend large amounts of social energy coping with prejudice and discrimination as well as functioning in a student culture they find unwelcoming” (p. 1). The literature review represented information on African Americans' higher education history, experiences and perceptions at historic Black colleges and predominately White institutions, and the conceptual theories that frame this research study.

Through this phenomenological study I present an argument, through the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students, for a renewed response for higher education institutions to review established visions on diversity, social, and academic interactions for African Americans attending predominately White institutions (Checkoway, 2001; Saenz et al., 2007). In the next chapter, I present the methodology for this study to gain an understanding of African American doctoral students' experiences and perceptions at a predominately White institution.

Chapter III

Methodology

Patton (2002) states, “We cannot observe feeling, thoughts, and intentions” (p. 341). In this qualitative phenomenological research study, I aimed to “give voice” to African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program at August University through a series of structured interviews (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano et al., 2000). There were a total of 10 participants interviewed: three African American doctorates (two males and one female), who graduated from the doctoral educational leadership program; two African American doctoral students (two females), who decided to discontinue their doctoral leadership educational leadership program; and five African American (two males and three females) doctoral candidates currently enrolled in the doctoral leadership program. Their experiences and perceptions are contained in the conversations that provide the primary data for this study (Creswell 2007; Patton, 2002).

The primary question of this qualitative phenomenological research study was: “What are the social and academic experiences of African American doctoral students at August University?” This question was asked of African American participants to determine if there was an “essence” to their shared experiences (Patton, 2002, p. 132), and if so, to make recommendations to August University regarding the experiences of African American doctoral students that will be enrolled in the educational leadership program (Wren, 2004). Nerad and Miller (1996) suggest that qualitative research of “graduate education process[es]” to “probe deeper into the issues that influence graduate students’ attrition...that allow for an understanding of why students leave before

completing the desired degree” (p. 62), may provide additional information for the doctoral educational program to be “able to design and implement effective policies and activities to improve program quality and, as a result, retain more students” (p. 62). By participating in the research study, the doctoral candidates were able to express their need for support, so they would be able to successfully attain a doctorate in educational leadership.

There were an additional three questions to support the interviewee answers to the primary question (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The interview questions were designed using Patton’s (2002) three approaches to interviewing: “the informal conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized open-ended interview” (p. 342). Each of Patton’s (2002) approaches was utilized throughout the interview process. The informal conversation with each interviewee at different intervals of the interview, just as if we are talking after class as usual and discussing what took place during class time, and how they felt about that particular evenings class; the general interview approach was used as a guide to let participants preview questions before they were actually interviewed; and three of the interview questions were standardized, so that all participants were asked the same interview questions as emphasized by the three approaches to interviewing (Patton, 2002).

The standardized interview questions used in the study were reprinted with the permission of Dr. Chris M. Golde (email communication, February 4, 2011). The questions were used by Dr. Golde in a national survey of over 4,000 doctoral students in 27 universities “to provide a snapshot of their experiences and goals” (Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). I chose to use these questions for my interview protocol because they

specifically addressed doctoral students experiences and perceptions regarding doctoral programs, advising, and support.

Context

August University espouses a commitment to cultivate students' understanding of social justice through building character and education as a shared outlook for attainment for all students who attend their university, as identified in its educational mission statement:

To ensure that faculty and undergraduate and graduate candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to foster academic achievement, social responsibility, personal responsibility and social justice in themselves so they can, in turn, facilitate high achievement in P-16 learner. (College Statistics, 2011b)

Nettles (2000) suggests “the importance of supportive relationships...in the academic experiences of students placed at risk” (p. 49). The doctoral educational leadership program at August University offers African Americans a way to break down barriers of entry into education leadership in public education (Allen, 1992; Tatum, 2000). In addition, attaining a terminal academic degree (doctorate) may raise the status of African Americans in their own community as well as within the dominant race's community (Allen, 1992, 2000; Tatum, 2000).

Setting

August University is a public institution with “approximately 11,000 students,” located near a suburban neighborhood in the northeast region of the United States (College Statistics, 2011a). The university was founded in 1923 and encompasses 25 acres of land donated by the nearby town. There are 9% African American students; 3% Asian American students; 7% Hispanic students; 2% International students; 0% Native American students; 76% White students; and 5% out-of-state students (College Statistics,

2011). The students' range of ages is as follows: Under the age of 18: 0%; 18-19 years old: 28%; 20-21 years old: 39%; 22-24 years old: 25%; and 25 plus years of age: 8%. The percentage of female faculty is 42% and 58% of the faculty is male. The diversity breakdown among the faculty is as follows: African American: 7%; Asian American: 9%; Hispanic: 3%; International: 4%; Native American: 1%; White: 75%; and Unknown: 1% (College Statistics, 2011a).

The cost for in-state tuition is approximately \$11, 234 per semester; out-of- state tuition is approximately \$18, 308; room and board is approximately \$9,958; and for books and supplies is approximately \$1,500 (College Statistics, 2011a). The cost for tuition as a graduate and/or doctoral student per semester is approximately, \$817.90. About 22% of the student body receives Federal Grant Aid; approximately 27% of the student body receives institutional grants; approximately 27% of the student body receives state grant aid; and approximately 60% of the student body receives student loans (College Statistics, 2011a).

August University offers the Educational Leadership doctoral program through four different formats that are available to prospective doctoral candidates. The first program is a hybrid online program (60% online and 40% face-to-face) that meets on three Saturdays during each 8-week semester with an accelerated time line during the semester. The second program meets at a nearby urban area where students meet for seven to eight weeks on one specific night of the week, which is also an accelerated program. The third doctoral program meets at a local community college with a curriculum specifically for doctoral students pursuing their degree for higher education.

The fourth doctoral program is a traditional format that meets (face-to-face) on the main campus (College Statistics, 2011a).

Participants

I recruited 10 participants for the study mainly from among candidates attending classes that meet on campus and classes that meet on a weekly basis for seven to eight weeks; however, African American volunteers from all four doctoral educational leadership formats, as well as former candidates to ensure that this study reflects the experiences of African American doctoral students in educational leadership at August University. Through this purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) I gained insight into the experiences of both current and former African American doctoral candidates. The power of purposeful sampling comes from an “emphasis on in-depth understanding” (p. 46) of the 10 participants whose experiences provide “information-rich cases.” According to Patton (2002), “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research“ (p. 46).

My research study provided African American students an opportunity to articulate their experiences and perceptions about their doctoral classes. Initially, I invited African American doctoral students in their second and/or third year in the doctoral educational leadership program. As a participant in the doctoral educational leadership program I had access to other African American doctoral students in the program. The African American doctoral students were aware of my dissertation topic and had expressed interest volunteering to participate. There were insufficient numbers therefore; I proceeded to invite first year African American doctoral students and former doctoral in students. I had chosen these groups of African American doctoral students and previous doctoral students to get a broader description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In

addition, I wanted to “focus attention on gathering data that lead to a textural description and a structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provided an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (p. 61). Through the data, participants had a voice in describing what their personal reality was in real time.

As the researcher, I protected the participants in this study by using pseudonyms in place of their real names (Glesne, 2006). In addition, I used a mixture of characteristics and descriptors as an alternative to protect the “anonymity” of the participants when I used direct quotes from the interviews in reporting the findings and discussing the research questions (Creswell, 2007, p. 141). The African American doctoral students who participated in this study were informed that their participation was voluntary and all information would be kept confidential. There was no risk to participants who chose to take part in the study. I had IRB approval to conduct this study from August University and completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) training to increase my understanding of the responsibilities of my role as researcher and the rights of participants.

Data Collection

I was able to capture a group of African American doctoral students’ experiences and perceptions in the educational leadership program at August University through interviews, notes, and my reflective journal. Aguirre (2004) states, “having voice empowers people of color to view their social reality as meaningful in a society that seeks to marginalize their presence” (p. 244). The data “captured and communicated” experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students and doctorates in their own words (Patton, 2002, p. 47).

Patton (2002) states, “people... are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40). I invited participants to volunteer for an in-depth “face-to-face” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181) interview about each of their personal experiences and perceptions of the August University educational leadership doctoral program. The interview protocol (Appendix A) is “semi-structured,” “open-ended,” and “intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). As I interviewed participants, I understood that I needed to ask additional probing questions in order for participants to “reflect and make connections” to the theories and to explore the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 231).

The interview questions and probes were used to draw out specific incidents that happened during the doctoral candidates and doctorates tenure at August University in the doctoral educational leadership program (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The information contributed to the phenomenological research study as “the data needed to draw nuanced conclusions about the content of the culture” (p. 53). During the interview progression, the interview probing questions assisted in “developing a textural description; develop a structural description; and develop the essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 157). The voices of the participants provided the significant data for the phenomenological research study (Creswell, 2007).

Validity and Reliability

Joppe (2000, as cited in Golafshani, 2003) defines validity as “whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are” (p. 599). Joppe defines reliability as “the extent to which results are

consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study” (p. 598). This phenomenology relied on a purposeful sample of African American doctoral students and doctoral candidates. This purposeful sampling was appropriate to reliably report the experiences and perceptions of African Americans in the August University doctoral program. African Americans are one of the few marginalized groups that can express their microaggressions while participating in a predominately White environment (Solórzano et al., 2000; Lewis et al., 2004). Therefore, only the African American doctoral students could address the phenomenon of “attending predominately White research institutions” and the “microaggressions, subtle and often unconscious racist acts that cumulatively add stress to the experiences of people of color” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 511) that may have been part of their experience at August University.

The triangulation of participant interviews and my reflective journal supported the qualitative phenomenological research study to “reduce the threats to internal validity and external validity” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Patton (2002) explains that by

Comparing what people say in public with what they say in private; checking for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time; comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view; and checking interviews against program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report. (Patton, 2002, p. 559)

In addition, I used member checking to validate doctoral students’ experiences and perceptions in the educational leadership program (Creswell, 2007). There are several reasons why I used member checking as the researcher: I am a student in the doctoral program and participants may have had different views on experiences within the educational program; participants may have forgotten what they said during the

interview process and how they told the story; and participants might have disagreed with my interpretations of their experiences and perceptions (Angen, 2001; Creswell, 2007; Morse, 1994; Patton, 2002; Sandelowski, 1993).

Patton (2002) also suggests using “Theory/perspective triangulation: Using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data” (p. 556). As a result of using the theory/perspective triangulation as a strategy, I was able to validate data using critical race theory, Tinto’s theory, Astin’s theory, and the experiences and perceptions of participants in the phenomenological research study (Patton, 2002).

Researcher’s Role

As an African American female doctoral candidate attending August University, I was careful of bias during fieldwork and analysis of data because, “it becomes important to emphasize that the issue is not one of dealing with a distorted or biased sample, but rather one of clearly delineating the purpose and limitations of the sample studies” (Patton, 2002, p. 563). In addition, I was aware of Peshkin’s (1988) theory of subjectivity and the implication of “its possible impact” (p. 20) on phenomenological research studies, therefore, I enhanced my awareness with “a formal, systematic monitoring of self” (p. 20).

I prepared myself and participants by being honest and open about the reasons for my research study (Patton, 2002). This action informed participants; established “credibility and trustworthiness” (p. 567) for the readers of the phenomenological research study; and dispelled “the predispositions, selective perceptions, and/or biases” (p. 567). Patton states, “The principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 566).

Therefore, as the researcher, I established my credibility and “principles of practice” (p. 564) for this phenomenological research.

Using qualitative research methods, I was able to rely on my knowledge of the context while reporting on the conversations of the African Americans doctoral students’ and doctorates’ experiences and perceptions in the doctoral educational leadership program at August University (Smith & Lytle, 2009). I was constantly aware of my own role in the qualitative inquiry as a participant in the doctoral educational leadership program, and my personal beliefs about student involvement and cultural diversity (Patton, 2002). As a participant-researcher, I also was aware of the “biases, values, and experiences” that I brought to this research study (Creswell, 2007, p. 243). During interviews, I encouraged participants, but I minimized my own involvement in the interview so I was be able to “obtain the needed information” for my research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35). By means of using theory/perspective triangulation, and returning to the literature during my analysis (Patton, 2002), I strived to limit researcher bias and subjectivity.

Data Analysis

I chose to use Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method for the analysis of data for this research study. The constant comparative method allowed me to review the data and recognize the themes “by using explicit coding and analytic procedures” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 102). I reviewed my reflective journal, going over my conversational notes, which allowed me to test the constant comparative method for data analysis in this research study (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002). This allowed me to get to the real meaning of the phenomenon for participants and

concentrate on participants' implied meaning to connect to their experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002). Patton explains that phenomenological research implies two perspectives, the first one is "what people experience and how they interpret the world," and the second perspective "is to experience the phenomenon as directly possible" (p. 106). This research study focused on these perspectives, through first person interviews, triangulating the data, and reflecting on data using constant comparison to understand the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students and doctorates (Patton, 2002). This constructed knowledge includes "both subjective and objective strategies for knowing" (p. 7).

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and the reoccurring themes were highlighted and color-coded for analysis. I reviewed all 10 transcriptions and chose three themes that appeared over and over again throughout the majority of the transcribed interviews. During the process of analyzing the data, I focused on two analysis strategies. The first is context sensitivity: the "possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space...extrapolating patterns for possible transferability and adaptation in new a setting" (Patton, 2002, p. 47). The second analysis strategy incorporates

Voice, perspective, and reflexivity: the qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective...the researcher's focus becomes balance—understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, political aware, and reflexive in consciousness. (Patton, 2002, p. 47)

The majority of interviews took place on the main campus of August University in the main library's classroom and the additional interview were on the off campus extension sites. David Silverman (2001) suggests, "phenomenon that can be made to reappear is the practical activity of participants in establishing a phenomenon in context –

the hyphenated phenomenon” (p. 300). This distinction is important for a reason: I wanted to place the participants in an “authentic site” (Silverman, 2001, p. 299) so the participants could call to mind their personal experiences and perceptions in the doctoral educational leadership program at August University. The next chapter presents the findings of the phenomenological research study.

Chapter IV

Findings

Patton (2002) describes critical theory as a framework, “which focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people’s experiences and understandings of the world” (p. 130). This chapter provides a contextual description, including stories of participants’ versions of personal experiences and/or perceptions as an African American doctoral student in the doctoral educational leadership program. The verbatim interviews are personal testimonies, which convey the participants’ contextual description of what transpired during their attendance as a doctoral student in the educational leadership program at a predominately White university (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

This chapter “gives voice” in relation to the experiences and perceptions of African American doctorates, doctoral candidates, and also doctoral candidates who discontinued their tenure at August University (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Beverly Tatum (1992) explains, “issues of oppression often generate powerful emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. Such resistance can ultimately interfere with the cognitive understanding and mastery of the material” (p. 1-2). The responses of the participants in the study to my primary research question: “What are the social and academic experiences of African American doctoral students?” generated a range of emotions. Using Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method, I identified four key themes from the voices that emerged: lack of university level support for diversity, ongoing disrespect, barriers to communication, and intimidation.

Lack of University Support for Diversity

The first theme describes the participants' experiences of the overall lack of support for diverse students enrolled in the August University doctoral program. This theme reflects both the hopes and aspirations of doctoral students, and how they were disappointed once enrolled with the level of support they received despite August University's claims to support and value diversity (Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009). The mission of the College of Education is for "graduate candidates to develop the knowledge, skills, ... social responsibility, social justice in themselves...combine the study of research, theory, and wisdom of practice in diverse settings with a variety of opportunities to apply knowledge, skills and dispositions to practice" (College Statistics, 2011a). The university claims to support diversity, but there is no evidence and no structures in place for African American doctoral students.

Orientation and advisement. Pontius and Harper (2006) suggest, the orientation process of prospective doctoral students should be "coordinated and multiple-day series of orientation activities...that present the realities of graduate education constitutes good practice in graduate student engagement" (p. 53). August University's 3-hour orientation on a weeknight offered an overview of the program, provided light refreshments, and then broke up into smaller groups for questions all within the 3-hour period. During the interview process I discovered participants felt the information that was presented to them at the initial open house where the prospective candidates were provided information about the doctoral educational leadership did not reflect what truly transpired once they began their doctoral program at August University. The disconnect between participants' anticipated support, and the support that they received in the doctoral

program was a recurring theme. For example, James, an administrator in a local school district where he has won numerous awards in counseling adolescent students in their career and academic choices, aspires to becoming a professor in higher education after completing the educational doctoral leadership program. His frustration over the lack of information, misinformation, and changes in requirements was apparent during an interview when he declared:

We did not get what was promised to us, in reference to the time line, in reference to the policy being changed several times, in reference to the necessary guidance, and the information needed in order for us to continue the process of getting this doctorate!

Rosemary, who is an administrator for a higher education institution, assists undergraduate multicultural students both academic and socially. Rosemary spoke cynically about the information at the orientation:

We were told that we were be able to complete the program in 3 years, but then there were things that were not told to us...for example that you would have to find your own advisor.

The 3-hour session at August University did not meet the needs of African American participants in this study. Patricia, who is the only African American administrator for a school district, recently left the doctoral educational leadership program without completing the terminal degree. She had a career aspiration of becoming a professor at a higher education once she retired from her school. Not having an advisor (or knowing who the advisor was) was an issue for most of the participants in the study. Patricia stated, "There are other doctoral programs in higher education where you enter the program with your own advisor and we did not have the same opportunity."

Lawrence, who recently transferred to August University's online hybrid leadership educational doctoral program from another PWI, also experienced frustration

and disappointment without the support of an advisor. He explained, “My assumption of an advisor is just what that word says - advises you all the way through the program.”

Pontius and Harper (2006) state, “an often neglected issue is that graduate students have specific needs and face developmental challenges that may differ from, but are as important as, those experienced by undergraduates” (p. 48). Despite the university’s claims that all doctoral students are assigned an advisor, Lawrence and Patricia’s experience indicate a different reality. Berry, Jay, and Lynn (2010) state, “Critical race theory in education research has called for an in-depth examination of the process, structures, practices, and policies that create and promote persistent racist and classist inequalities in schooling and education” (p. 6). The process of assigning advisors was either overlooked or ignored for certain African American doctoral students in the study, as confirmed by Patricia’s statement challenging the university’s claim: “and then to tell us we had an advisor when the advisor had never made any contact with us.”

Academic support. Rosemary has career aspirations of expanding the multicultural program to include mentoring and advising for graduate and doctoral students. Rosemary also commented on the type of support expected when she enrolled in the doctoral educational leadership program at August University, stating, “I thought that in the foundational classes there should have been more out of class practical support by professors.” She related that the “expectations from the faculty members for doctoral students at that level to know the technical and practical skills of being in a doctoral program” did not necessarily reflect the prior academic preparation of the diverse students in the cohort. She felt that according to the professors, “It did not matter where you came from or what you doing prior to enrolling in the leadership educational doctoral

program,” but felt that different students needed different support depending on the masters’ level program they had completed.

Rosemary’s educational aspirations reflected those of other African Americans who view the terminal degree as a conduit to “economic and social well-being (Garriott, Love, & Tyler, 2008, p. 45). Similarly, her perception of professors is the same as most K-12 African American educators: that by supporting students, it will enhance the desired positive outcomes of the learner. Sedlacek (1999) states, “because faculty members, students (White), and staff often view Black students differently than they do White students, it is harder for Blacks to get straightforward information on which to base their evaluation of how they are faring” (p. 540). African American doctoral students in the leadership educational doctoral program felt at a disadvantage, for example, Rosemary expected more direct support from faculty in areas such as writing and using APA during the “foundational” coursework.

Patricia often felt frustrated in class along with others when “the class also was on the same level of confusion because we didn’t know what was expected of all us.” She also shared that the students “thought we would receive more support from the institution.” Sedlacek (1999) states, “Blacks may find it especially difficult to get close enough to faculty, staff, and other students to become a central part of the informal communication system that is critical in making self-assessments” (p. 540). Patricia did not feel connected to the program in a way that she could ask for support. Rosemary’s disappointment added weight to Patricia’s comments. Speaking about the level of support received during the program, Rosemary stated, “I was just disappointed in the leadership educational doctoral program, period.”

James admitted to needing to see the leadership attributes that he was learning in theory from “the books [that] shared wonderful knowledge and frameworks of collaboration.” In fact, part of his disappointment with the program was the fact that “There was no modeling of the leadership from the professors in the leadership educational doctoral program.” Despite the fact the James entered the educational leadership program as a professional in the field of education, armed with a sense of persistence based on waiting and preparing for the future (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Nettles & Millett, 1999), he did not feel adequately prepared through the coursework that he completed. He stated, “I was expected to go out into the world and implement what I saw. No way.”

Reflecting on the supports that were expected after her initial experience at the doctoral program information session, and her experience in the educational leadership program, Patricia took a “lessons learned” approach to counsel others considering doctoral programs:

As an administrator I would shared with prospective African American students twice a year (December and May) about the negative and positives of attending a predominately White institution.

I always begin with you must really research the college institution of your choice and I presented the following steps: Attend a meet and greet that all institutions should provide for perspective students; research the institution online; try to talk to past students of the college informally to ask questions in setting away from the initial meet and greet; visit the campus on an off day to have lunch in the dining area or just talk to students you casually meet along the way to the dining area; and it is important to set an appointment with the program administrators and/or if possible to set-up an appointment with a faculty member to ask questions that may of concern to you.

If perspective African Americans follow these general steps they will get a better feel of the physical environment and perhaps they will not make some of the mistakes I made in selecting an institution.

Susan Gardner (2009b) suggests that all doctoral students seek “success” as they enter into any doctoral program (p. 384). James, Rosemary, Patricia, and Lawrence each had educational and career aspirations that they thought would be realized through pursuing a doctoral degree. MacGregor Burns (2003) states, “Nothing strengthens the motivational power of efficacy like success. Persons with a high feeling of efficacy have great confidence in their ability to make changes, to remain committed to goals, to overcome difficulties and failures, to exercise control” (p. 150). The participants who volunteered for this research study are committed to giving back to the African American community. When asked whether their tenure in the leadership educational doctoral program had influenced their professional careers, participants expressed positive and negative comments. Patricia stated, “No, because I did not share what I would have liked to the district, because I think that what I learned was not positive at all.”

Ongoing Disrespect

Ralph Waldo Emerson states, “The secret in education lies in respecting the student” (Emerson, n.d.). The second theme, of ongoing disrespect, can be viewed through the lens of critical race theory, as “the nature of race and racism are ever changing and that racism is not necessarily the product of biased actions, but can be the artifact of seemingly liberal, neutral or normed rules and actions” (Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009, p. 183). During the course of interviews and conversations with participants, many of their shared experiences indicated an ongoing and pervasive disrespect for both individuals and groups of African American students in the educational leadership program. Disrespect surfaced as policy changes without input or prior knowledge, additional program requirements, restrictions or additional

requirements on dissertation committee selection, condescending attitudes, and microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Policy changes. Davis (2007a) states, “Institutional racism refers to the intended or unintended consequences that emerge from the operation procedures, rules, habits, culture, and symbols of a given organization or institution that negatively affect the marginalized in relation to that of the dominant group” (p. 219). Lawrence’s feelings of being disrespected in the doctoral program suggest these findings hold true at August University when he lamented, “they promised that we would graduate within three years of coming to the doctoral program and yet we were not even allowed to ask professors to serve as chairs for our dissertation.” Tiana is a doctorate, who has published educational articles in the United States and Europe and started a small consulting business that assists school districts with transformational change that focuses on professional learning communities for teachers; she is also employed full time with the local government. Tiana stated, “the dissertation process kept changing without reason or clarification for each change...we enrolled with one documented policy about the dissertation process and it has changed at least three times within a three month period.” The rapid policy changes in the educational leadership program seemed to affect all of the participants in the study. In addition to feeling left out of policy decisions that would impact their program completion, participants were frustrated with “all [the] new rules [that] were established within one semester without any prior notice explanations as to why.”

Freeman (1997) states, “Individuals who would be most affected and who should be the first to be consulted are not given a voice in the dialogue, as if they had no stake in these important decisions that determine the course of the policies that will affect their

lives” (p. 1). Rosemary’s question about policy changes, “Why are all of the policy changes about obtaining dissertation chairs happening so quickly as we getting closer to deciding our dissertation chairs?” was not addressed to the university administration, but to fellow doctoral students in a parking lot conversation. The practice of discussing important issues or concerns in the parking lot, removed from those who might have influence or power to correct a situation, is another example of the lack of voice felt by participants in the study, and indicative of perceived barriers. Allen (1992) suggests, “universities must also become more proactive and deliberate in the actions taken to address barriers to African American success within their institutions” (p. 42).

Microaggressions. Solórzano et al. (2000) found that microaggressions can be automatic or unconsciously directed at people of color. The goal of phenomenology is to understand “the world” of participants in a study through their experiences (Patton, 2002). Participants’ perceptions in this study included feeling disrespected though the words, actions, and body language of certain professors. These microaggressions contributed to their frustration and disappointment in the educational leadership program (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Brian, who recently left the leadership educational doctoral program, is an administrator in a local school district. Brian has been recognized by his school district for creating an innovative curriculum program that is being used by teachers throughout his school district. Brian observed that certain professors exhibited “a lack of respect” when they displayed negative attitudes “in front of the class.” Brian considered certain comments by professors inappropriate, but the persuasive power exhibited by the professor had an influence on the other doctoral students in the cohort. Tatum (1992)

states, “While it may seem easy for some students to challenge the validity of what they read or what the instructor says, it is harder to deny what they have seen with their own eyes” (p. 18).

Sharon, a teacher who has received special awards for her creative teaching style and her teacher directed concepts in her school district, stated that not all professors “were condescending,” but she believed that the condescending attitudes towards African American students in the leadership educational doctoral courses was “coming from individuals that do not know the diverse backgrounds of the individuals in the classroom.” Not all African Americans have the same background, according to Isaac (1998), Lovitts (2001), and Farmer (2003). Sharon claimed that “professors slipped up and said things they were not suppose to say...they knew nothing about what we had experienced while growing up and we knew nothing about the actual doctoral process except what we were experiencing now.” Sharon thought some professors had “their preconceived notions of what a doctoral student should do and how they should do it.” For example, Sharon stated that when explaining APA guidelines, “some professors... just spoke to us in a child like manner and their body language was interpreted by us as an indication African Americans had a different education experience than White students.”

Sedlacek (1999) suggests, “institutional racism involves policies and procedures, either formal or informal, that result in negative outcomes for Blacks” (p. 541). James, added to the conversation about inherent misconceptions of African Americans doctoral students in the program: “A professor on the first night of class asked a group of us if we were familiar with “Blackboard,” because the professor told us that they were told we did

not know how to use it.” James felt that this comment was clearly disrespectful and assumed that African American students did not know anything about technology

Fullan (2007) states, “a constellation of factors” functions in schools “to suppress teacher and student desire for achievement” (p. 136). Certainly, the ongoing disrespect perceived by the African American doctoral students in the study had an impact on persistence in the leadership educational program. Asking for clarification about exactly what is needed, or what is meant, by certain items outlined in a syllabus can be considered an authentic factor to success in coursework (Fullan, 2007). For example, Lawrence needed clarification on the requirements of a major paper. He asked the professor a question during the first of three face-to-face meetings of the online class and was told to “follow the rubric.” The response left him feeling like he had asked a stupid question, but more significantly, he felt disrespected as his question was left unanswered.

Manifestation of microaggressions. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state, “Whiteness when conferred on certain student performances is alienable... students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived ‘White norms’ or sanctioned for cultural practices for example, dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge, White property is being rendered alienable” (p. 59). Ajene, a teacher in a urban school district shares her experience of being excluded in a dissertation study group facilitated by a professor at one of the off campus extension sites:

Our coursework is complete and so one night a week a group of us still meet to work on our chapters 1, 2, and 3, so we can complete dissertation seminar class. In addition, we have to complete this course before we are eligible to get chairs, dissertation committees, and present our benchmark II. Our group was not invited to join the group that meets with a professor who provides feedback to the African American doctoral students who are working on their chapters 1, 2, and 3. In addition, these African Americans are from our cohort, I do not think this is fair for some students to be invited to join the study group and others are excluded.

Our group will not complain because we know the situation is all too familiar and this issue would be explained differently by the professor including the African American doctoral students in the professor's study group.

Professors tend to use their particular rank as professors as justifiable actions when inequity is pointed out by a group or individuals as an injustice in the educational leadership doctoral program (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Professors who proclaim constantly that they are not racist, but then act inappropriately in front of doctoral students tend to counter their espoused rhetoric with African American doctoral students, which makes African Americans feel uncomfortable, misdirected, and confused, especially when the professors think their actions are appropriate (Feagin, 1992; Kailin, 1998-1999). These collective microaggressions are subtle covert racist actions that are hidden within policies, annoying looks by professors and administration, and coded language, and are frustrating for African American doctoral students (Feagin, 1992). McCabe (2009) states, "Microaggressions are powerful because, despite being invisible to the perpetrator, they exact toll on the recipient's psyche" (p. 133). Microaggressions contribute to "isolation and self-doubt," a major issue for African Americans in predominately White institutions (Sue et al., 2007)., promulgated by "a lack of inclusive campus activities, intentional exclusion from the department's formal and informal networks (i.e., student study groups, research projects, publication opportunities and social activities); and misadvisement by apathetic advisors" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 345).

Barriers to Communication

Communication and the factors that created barriers to effective communication between participants and university administration and faculty, and among cohort members, comprise the third theme. This theme highlights how different ways of

communicating can be confusing: by what is implied by administration during recruitment, by what is read in the program literature and textbooks, and by what is learned in the classroom (Brooks & Heiland, 2007; White & Lowenthal, 2011). It also describes how frustration regarding academic ability and access to information resulted in groups and subgroups being formed. Contrary to Allen's (1992) findings that, "Black students often find it necessary to create their own social and cultural networks in order to remedy their exclusion from the wider, White-oriented university community" (p. 29), the participants in this study did not speak or act as a cohesive group – neither as educational leadership students in a cohort, nor as African Americans.

Divide and conquer. Unresolved issues and conflicts can translate into problems for African American doctoral students who sense they have to dispel stereotyping about African Americans (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Lawrence describes a situation in which African Americans hold their heads down and keep silent in order to cover up their lack of understanding of writing a review of the literature: "I know that the African Americans in my group did not understand and were not clear about how to create a lit review and they did not ask questions or verbalize their concerns during class." Similarly, Sharon gives the following account: "I asked a question about the syllabus, because no one else inquired, although the other African Americans were just as confused about the instructions, but said nothing to support my efforts to get clarification."

Gusa (2010) states, "Today's PWIs do not have to be explicitly racist to create a hostile environment. Instead, unexamined historically situated White cultural ideology embedded in the language, cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge allow these institutions to remain racialized" (p. 465). Rosemary described her first

experience with the language of the doctoral educational leadership program at August University:

It seems to me that the program would be better served if they supported the idea of academic enrichment, then everybody would have been better served especially, the ones in charge. This process silences voices and create cliques within the cohort, therefore, doctoral experiences are watered down.

Domhoff (in Gusa, 2010) states, “domination does not mean complete control; rather, it is the ability to set the terms by which other groups and classes must operate” (p. 469). The formations of subgroups and cliques seemed to be tied to access to information and eventual success in the program. In fact, Sharon declared, “The African Americans that got a little closer to the dissertation process were then considered uppity and we completely ignored them.”

Michelle, who is enrolled in the leadership educational doctoral program at an extension site, has implemented an after school program that focuses on building self-esteem in young African American males. She described a similar experience among African American doctoral students:

We sat together as a group not knowing by the end of the second class that this group would break up into subgroups, which started talking about each other instead of supporting one another, because the subgroups did not want to share information with another subgroup.

Michelle started later in the program than other African Americans, and shared, “I felt like an outsider trying to fit in.” Even when she discovered that there were two other doctoral students from her school district in her classes, she declared, “I was not immediately accepted in the group, so I had to prove my allegiance, which was an added emotional stress.” The division among students could have been addressed by faculty, but was not. For example, Lawrence recounts his experience with the social climate and academic interactions in the educational leadership doctoral program: “It seemed to me

that there was no effort by the administration for us to meet with other doctoral students to find out what they were doing.”

Division among African American doctoral students resulted when students tried to prove their academic ability to the professors and to their White peers by asking the questions they felt they needed to ask in order to be on same level as their White peers. When Lawrence asked a question about an assignment in class, however, he felt that “no help was given to my question” and the other African Americans in class sat silent. African Americans “take action when it is in their best interests and do not take action when it might cause them more trouble than it is worth to them” (Sedlacek, 1999, p. 540). Nerad and Miller (1996) found African American “students had the impression that they were wasting the time of the faculty or encountered few expressions of concerns about their personal and professional advancement” (p.71). Lawrence believed the silence of his cohort members was their way of dispelling “the commonly held misconception that affirmative action policies and efforts to diversify colleges campuses have eroded quality and excellence” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p.518). Statements such as “we do not want this department to become a papermill” (Sharon’s interview) by university faculty and administrators suggests that the concerns of African American students in the program were at least partially well founded. When “two different pieces of information about the dissertation process which was communicated to the extension cohort and to the main campus cohort” indicated the administration treated students in the main campus cohort and the extension cohort differently as regards chair and committee selection, Sharon admitted, “Some of us starting breaking away from the groups we were in to assert to the

administration that they were no longer associated with the African Americans in the extension cohort.”

Whether the division among African American students in the program was a result of “insider” or “outsider” influence (Delpit, 1992), the following interview excerpt from Sharon, provides yet another perspective:

The reason the doctoral program kept us from organizing and defending ourselves is we did not apply the frameworks and theories we had learned. We did not espouse what we wrote in our own papers, because there is a common thread on how to handle the concerns with the policy changes.

We failed as a group, because no one knows about our concerns but us, we did not follow their process of meeting or talking with administration about our issues, and we just talked amongst ourselves and kept quiet in order to complete the program. So, we are to blame also for our situation, because we never implemented what they taught us.

Problems of academic communication. Allen (1992) states, “universities seem to be not only content with, but committed to, the current system of structured inequality, a system in which African Americans suffer grievously” (p. 42). Sedlacek (1999) affirms “prejudice can take such forms as lower expectations of Black students than are warranted...reducing the quality of communication (p. 544). The educational leadership doctoral students experienced “isolation and partly because of norms of not sharing, observing, and discussing one another’s work” (Lortie as cited in Fullan, 2007, p. 132 & 133) by professors limiting or not providing critical information essential to their educational attainment in the doctoral program. Contrary to Rosemary’s claim that certain “professors that really cared assisted doctoral students by going the extra mile,” Sharon expressed, “There seemed to be an objection from the administration of us succeeding in the doctoral program.” Johnson-Bailey et al. (2009) also found, “the

isolation, loneliness, disconnection, and discrimination experience as a minority on a White campus...is frequently mentioned by participants” (p. 192).

White and Lowenthal (2011) suggest “ignorance of and resistance to academic discourse result in far too many students remaining outsiders to and often dropouts from a powerful means to greater academic and personal success” (p. 287). Sharon’s success in the doctoral educational leadership program was constrained by her inability to communicate and to understand the academic discourse (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Sharon shares her frustration with communication from professors: “They never were as specific as they should have been in really sharing information that was pertinent in reference to the dissertation process.” language and associate rules of school discourse” (White & Lowenthal, 2010, p. 293). Rosemary described her first experience with the language of the educational leadership doctoral program at August University: “It seems to me that the program would be better served if they supported the idea of academic enrichment, then everybody would have been better served.” Rosemary admits that it takes time to get “comfortable” with academic language, and that the program faculty should have taken the time to “teach me that language.”

A band-aid approach. Doolittle et al. (2006) emphasize the “importance of students’ voice during the learning process” (p. 12). The educational leadership department scheduled a series of evening workshops that focused on different topics for doctoral students, including: “Careers in Educational Leadership,” “Developing and Implementing PLCs,” “The IRB Process: Views from the Committee,” “The Dissertation Process,” and “Student Research: Speaking of Rivers.” African American doctoral students had no input into the workshops designed to increase “student scholarly

productivity.” Patricia stated, “I stopped attending the workshops, because I felt that they never addressed what I needed to be successful in the doctoral program.” Similarly, Rosemary acknowledged her frustrations with the doctoral workshops, as she shared, “I went to two of the workshops. An hour seminar on writing APA, really? I needed more than one hour about APA writing.” Participants felt the doctoral workshops “were disorganized.” James conveyed his thoughts about the evening doctoral workshops, claiming, “There was no incentive to drive 30 miles to the main campus after working all day for an hour workshop just to listen to someone lecture.” The African Americans in the study needed to feel as though the leadership educational doctoral program was “a supportive environment . . . where students experience high academic and social integration into programs and activities” (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 2). In contrast, the organization of the workshops displayed “a lack of planning by the faculty by not inquiring about doctoral students’ professional constraints as school leaders” (James’ interview) regarding their ability to attend the workshops on a Monday. For many doctoral students working as educational professionals, “It was almost impossible to leave the building early on a Monday” (James’ interview).

Professors, “often assume that students have – prior to beginning in school – the language and accompanying communication required for academic success” (Delpit, 1992,1997; Heath, 1983 in White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 292). In addition, “Students are expected to adapt their ways with words to that of their school despite rarely ever receiving direct instruction in the language and associate rules of school discourse” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 293). New research suggests, however, that faculty in PWIs “need to clarify course expectations for students in general and, particularly, to

communicate to Black students that they will be held to the same standards as other students” (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 937). Academic language begins in the K-12 curriculum; and, “not all K-12 students receive the same access to or have the same motivation for learning and appropriating academic literacy (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 284). Therefore, African American doctoral students may not have had the same preparation to compete with other students in a predominately White institution (White & Lowenthal, 2011).

Beeler (as cited in Lewis et al., 2004) suggests that African Americans that enter into predominately White institution as doctoral students are under the impression that they are already “academically underprepared” because of their backgrounds. Rosemary recounted how a professor assumed that everyone in the course was aware of the requirements of creating a lit review. She shared: “I did not know anything about what a lit review was and I did not receive that information in my masters program about a lit review.” Rosemary knew that the African Americans in her group did not understand how to create a literature, but “they did not ask questions or verbalize their concerns during class.” In after-class discussions, students maintained that professors needed to “teach” rather than “facilitate” the literature review. The workshop series had provided only a band-aid for this major component of the dissertation process. Perhaps the leadership educational doctoral program should examine why doctoral students seek “safety in silence” and safety in peer groups and whether these groups are positive, because doctoral “students grades are affected, they feel alienated and intellectually inferior” for their understanding of “academic discourse” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 298).

Intimidation

The fourth and final theme from the study's findings is perhaps the most stark and revealing of the experiences of the African American students enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at August University. Throughout the interviews and conversation, participants used words such as "demeaned," "frightened," and "threatened" when relating exchanges with certain professors over writing assignments, grades, and benchmark performance.

Unresolved issues and conflicts can translate into problems for African American doctoral students who sense they have to dispel stereotyping about African Americans (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), however, language and communication are a barrier, particularly with regard to navigating university policy. Sharon reported an incident that transpired between her and a professor:

We were divided into groups of two to complete a project the professor gave us. My partner was not satisfied with the grade, so she approached the professor and expressed her concerns about the grade.

The professor asked us to make changes in the written assignment and we followed the required changes and received a lower grade than the initial grade. My partner was upset and said we should file a grievance. I told her to leave it alone, because it was obvious that the professor was not going to agree with us.

Sharon did not feel that she had the social power to navigate the university policy as regards grieving a grade, and convinced her partner not to pursue when faced with the professor's "power of the pen." Sedlacek (1999) points out that "when Blacks show leadership on campus it is often through informal or Black oriented channels" (p. 543), however, in this instance, Sharon and her partner knew that they had to end this confrontation with the professor, because they would not realize any satisfaction from the situation.

The policy changes, discussed under the theme of ongoing disrespect, also played a significant role in the theme of intimidation. For example, speaking about the impact the policy changes had on Lawrence's progress in the educational leadership program, he admitted, "Changing rules in the middle of the games causes a person to put their head down just to complete the program. Once you understand that you have to submit to the new rules without questions then you are welcomed to continue onto the field." African Americans, especially older African American who have had experience with adversity, have learned to be persistent in order to complete any task they have started through perseverance (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Lawrence "put his head down" to finish the program when he was nearing the end of the dissertation process, but still stated that professors used criticism "to tear down your self-esteem rather than criticize to encourage excellence in the program."

Anthony is a current doctoral student who was recently considered for a promotion in his school district, and upon completion of the doctoral program will pursue a career in higher education. Although he is happy to be in the program, he "will be glad to finish." Anthony compared the intimidation that he and other African Americans felt in the program to his undergraduate experience when he shared: "The way African Americans are being treated reminds me so much of the way I was treated when I was pledging at a historic Black college. I guess HBCs prepare you academically and socially for the struggles ahead of you as an African American." Anthony aspires to working in a PWI with a role in supporting African American students, and states: "I know what I have endured at this university...insensitivity, ignorance, and incidents that were

inappropriate is evidence enough that changes in attitudes toward African Americans have not changed.”

Timitra is a media personality with her own non-profit business and a motivational speaker for local educational organizations. Despite “inappropriate remarks” about African American students in K-12 classrooms during classroom management discussions, Timitra resisted the urge to challenge professors’ misconceptions and stereotypical remarks. “I knew that defending or challenging their perspective on the African American race in the doctoral class would not let me reach my goal and that was to get that terminal degree.” Clearly, the perceived threat of postponing her program completion effectively “silenced” Timitra in class discussions.

Silencing. After dropping out of the educational program, April a supervisor in a northeast school district received a grade for an assignment that was submitted two months prior to her discontinuing courses in educational leadership doctoral program. This was an attempt to silence April about an incident that took place during her benchmark presentation:

I was taking a course during my benchmark presentation and I had an issue with a professor about an assignment and findings the professor alleged. The professor emailed me to set-up a meeting with herself and an administrator. In the meeting only myself and the professor was present, the administrator never showed up for the meeting and no explanation was given for the administrator’s absence. After waiting for the administrator for a length of time the professor began the meeting by requesting that I was not allowed to speak during the meeting.

Questioning authoritative structures within the educational leadership doctoral program creates conditions that hold back and delay African American doctoral students from moving forward in the program; therefore, “blatant non-affirming classroom experiences” have kept African American doctoral students silenced and caused them to put their heads down (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 344). Parker and Villalpando (2007) state, “to deal

with the issue of trust/mistrust between education leaders... and students of color... perception is reality, and whether education administrators agree with this or not, it cannot be ignored when trying to achieve racial equity” especially when it is in the context of sustaining success in the educational leadership doctoral program at August University (Parker & Villapando, 2007, p. 524).

April’s narrative of being silenced continues, and provides evidence of the lack of administrative support at August University: continues her story about the meeting:

The professor explained why the meeting was called and the consequences at the meeting. I thought the professor violated my rights as a human being, because I had no say so in my own defense. I could only listen to the statements presented without any rebuttal from me. In addition, there was no visual evidence presented, so I could view the alleged violation. I left the doctoral program feeling let down by the administration, faculty and to some extent my fellow cohorts.

Grosset (1997) strongly suggests, “There should be clearly identified institutional resources which will intervene when students are confronted with an academic or personal crisis which may impact upon their decision to re-enroll or interfere with their learning” (p. 57). There was no advisor, mentor or administrator to assist April in her issue with the professor. April continues, “I called and emailed the administrator that was to be present during the meeting and the administrator to date has not responded to my request for support.” Therefore, “when Whites neglect to identify the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates (Grosset, 1997, p. 465). Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, and Bowles (2008) also agree, stating “although perceived racism may be unintentional and a by product of liberal and dispassionate rules and actions intended to address the normed majority, Black graduate students are still

negatively affected by the resulting lack of support, regardless of the intentionally” (p. 376).

New policies. The implementation of new policies about academic writing and plagiarism evoked additional feelings of being targeted. Gusa (2010) suggests that doctoral programs fall short in “identifying the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, [when] they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates” (Gusa, 2010, p. 465). Timitra recalled hearing about the new policy in class, but suggested, “There is a different language going from a bachelor level to master level and then to a doctoral level, their language you are not accustomed to and there seems to be an expectation that you already know their language.” Students felt intimidated by the way the new writing policies were presented. Lawrence recalled the first time information on the new policy on plagiarism was shared:

When eventually it got to end of the lecture the assumption was that no one had made us aware of this criminal act and if we committed this horrendous act there would be repercussions which would be supported by the university administration without chance for us to give details or to clarify what took place. In other words the professor was the judge and jury.

African American doctoral students felt intimidated by significant statements regarding APA mistakes on writing assignments, and plagiarism threats that would result in students being removed from the doctoral program. In addition, there was a sense of being targeted, and not feeling safe, as Patricia laments: “There is no place for us to go to get informed correct answers to our questions... [or] feel that our conversations are kept confidential and we feel safe.”

The participants in the study shared similar experiences, but had different outcomes. Some are still in the program, others completed the program, and still others left the program after investing “three years of financial aid loans and hard work to just say ok and walk away.”

Conclusion

The statistical sketch of the African American doctoral student, as reported by the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (News and Views, 2005), the “average age of the African American doctoral student is 37.4, nearly one half of all blacks awarded doctorates in 2003 plan careers in academia, 42.7 percent of doctoral recipients in 2003 plan to teach at the university level” (p. 2). Indeed, Isaac (1998) claims that, “African Americans have a social and cultural obligation to obtain advanced degrees” (p. 4). Despite the disappointments I discovered through my conversations with African American doctorates who completed their terminal degree, or were still persisting in the doctoral educational leadership program, they did not and still do not deal with the past or focus on the negatives of the present, but are still preparing for their future as doctorates in the field of educational leadership (Davis, 2007b; Waite & Crocco, 2004). The themes of lack of university level support for diversity, ongoing disrespect, barriers to communication, and intimidation inform the discussion of the research questions in the study, as well as the conceptual frameworks that provide additional insight in the next chapter. Recommendations based on the experiences of the African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program are presented in the final chapter in order to support the continued motivation, commitment, and persistence of African American doctoral students at August University (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009).

Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter presents a more in-depth analysis and discussion of each research question. This phenomenology was a study of the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral students and African American doctorates as they told their stories of their involvement in the educational leadership doctoral program. The common thread that links these stories is found in the themes that have emerged: lack of university level support for diversity, ongoing disrespect, barriers to communication, and intimidation in the educational leadership doctoral program. The critical data reflected in the lengthy conversations and interviews with the African American doctoral students and doctorates provide insight and meaning about their experiences while enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at August University.

As a participant-researcher and doctoral student enrolled in the educational leadership program, my conversations and interviews with other students were a powerful part of this study. The concept of “giving voice” to African American doctoral students and doctorates was profound. Pontius and Harper (2006) argue that an “often neglected issue is that graduate students have specific needs and face developmental challenges that may differ from, but are as important as, those experienced by undergraduates” (p. 48). In addition, there are implications that if students enter a doctoral program coming from a historically Black institution, and enroll in a predominately White institution, the conditions are “quite different from and more challenging to navigate” (Pontius & Harper, 2006, p. 47). In addition, Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Hamilton-Howard

(2007) consider how African doctoral students and faculty “should be engaged in conversations that allow them to critically examine how students of color experience the various aspects of campus environment... and the implications these experiences have for student success” (p. 45). The interviews with 10 doctoral students and doctorates in the course of this study provided the data to answer my research questions.

Voices Heard

Diggs et al. (2009) state, “The use of storytelling [and] interviews can introduce voices and experiences that are traditionally unrepresented in education literature” (p. 329). I asked one doctoral student, and that led to another doctoral student who desired to participate in this study, then another, until I reached my target of 10 participants. Nerad and Miller (1996) experienced a similar “snowball effect” during their qualitative research study involving increasing the retention of graduate students (p. 67). One of the main reasons, in my opinion, the snowball effect happened in this study was because the interviewees were provided an opportunity to voice anonymously and without repercussion, what took place and is taking place at August University in the doctoral educational leadership program (Farmer, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Besides the interviews, many conversations took place over the course of the study: after class, in the parking lot, and over the phone. According to Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008), “Although perceived racism may be unintentional and a byproduct of liberal and dispassionate rules and actions intended to address the normed majority, Black graduate students are still negatively affected by the resulting lack of support, regardless of the intentionality” (p. 376). I agree that these experiences and perception are very problematic and through my research I have discovered that these subtle incidents are not just isolated to this particular predominately White institution, but these bothersome

experiences for African American doctoral students are happening at other PWIs (Golde, 1998; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). However, I agree with Sedlacek (1999), who states, “There has been very little evaluation research” about doctoral education program because “most of the research has been descriptive ...descriptive research is helpful, but it does not focus on change” (p. 544). The purpose of this phenomenology was to “give voice” to African American doctoral students in the educational leadership doctoral program in order to understand their experiences. I include here a summary of the “parking lot” discussions and informal conversations that took place after class or workshop meetings with participants, and add some of my own thoughts, as well. Some of the suggested changes to improve the educational experience of African American students at August University are also reflected in the findings and later in the discussion of the research questions.

African American faculty and administrators. In one fierce parking lot conversation on what would make this doctoral educational leadership program viable for African American retention at August University, many African American doctoral students agreed that the administration should actively seek and hire additional African American faculty and administrators. African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program were adamant about acquiring additional African American professors for support, because they would be, “essential in helping them to complete their graduate studies and survive in graduate school” (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008, p. 373).

I agree with the hiring of additional African American professors and administrators, but I do not agree that just because one is an African American professor

that one is central to doctoral students successfully completing and surviving in a doctoral program at a PWI. Despite the fact that African American professors are Black it does not mean that “Black students fare better in traditionally White colleges and universities when they see professors with whom they can identify” (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 932). As an African American, I agree that it is sometimes easier to communicate with another African American professional, but not all African American professionals will empathize with other African Americans.

My past has taught me, “to value diversity, to move beyond stereotypical ways of communicating with and about others, which will be mandatory to demonstrate in the world of work” (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 939). This has manifested in my learning through understanding that negative words can devalue a student’s expectations for success. Demeaning words by a professor are a catalyst for African American doctoral students not reaching their vision of completing their terminal degree. I looked to professors who spoke words of vision, words of encouragement, and believed in me more than I believed in myself. They saw the potential and gave guidance and direction. The conversations always then shift to examples and instances of White professors who really do make a connection with African American doctoral students and are authentic about their relationship that perhaps would “take many forms, including demonstration, instruction, challenge, and encouragement on a more or less regular basis over an extended period of time” (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 934).

Advisors that are visible. The second most talked about issue was what African American doctoral students claimed to be an easy fix for administration, which is to assign an advisor that is visible, accessible, and specific to African American doctoral

students' needs. Not having, or knowing, who one's doctoral advisor was, was a key concern throughout several interviews.

The conversations took into consideration the financial costs of creating a student center and decided that just having a person that is solely dedicated to African American doctoral students needs would be cost effective. In the conversations the concept of affordances was discussed at length and we agreed that an advisor would assist with "social coordination, social interaction in the acquisition of knowledge, behavioral competence and the importance of cultural practices in organizing the shared focus of attention and in revealing and creating affordances for action and interaction" in the educational leadership doctoral program (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 114). The lack of advisement was a key component to the participants' dissatisfaction with, and for some separation from, the educational leadership program.

The doctoral students and doctorates have kept their voices silent, not even sharing verbally with the peers in the educational leadership program, and not writing their true perceptions in reflective journals, which were a requirement for some of the doctoral students' coursework until these interviews. In the next section I discuss these findings in relation to the research questions of the study.

Research Questions Answered

What are the social and academic experiences of African American doctoral student's? African American doctoral students who were enrolled in the leadership educational doctoral program were "led to believe by university representatives that support systems were already in place to assist them in integrating into the social and academic life of the institution" (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 5). When doctoral students and

doctorates answered this question about social and academic experiences I established through the findings that there were very limited or no social and academic activities that were organized to accommodate the specific needs of African American doctoral students in the leadership educational doctoral program. In addition, I discovered the unresponsiveness, lack of interest, and the lack of concern for African American doctoral students in leadership educational doctoral program by faculty and administration had a negative effect on the African American doctoral students (Freeman, 1997; Nettles, 1990; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008, 2009). I concur with Tinto (1975) and Astin (1982, in Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008), that “these factors significantly affect student satisfaction and result in a compounding dilemma because student satisfaction has been shown to influence the performance and completion rate for Black college students more than for White college students” (p. 67). In other words, “achieving academic success on a college campus is, in large part, predicted upon students’ respective exposure to academic discourse and willingness to learn and employ it” (p. 284). I agree with White and Lowenthal (2011) that more research needs to be done concerning African American doctoral students and “the central role that literacy—or more specifically the academic language that is required for full participant status in the discourse community of the university” (Love & Wenger, 1991, as cited in White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 248). Rosemary’s statement suggests this was true for participants in the study. She stated, “The preconceived notions of what a doctoral student should do and how they should do it made us think that we were weak or did not know how to write and that is not it true.” African American doctoral students who entered the doctoral educational leadership program perhaps were not acquainted with the language of the doctoral program

professors; therefore, they had an added pressure to adapt quickly to this social and academic environment (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2011).

The voices of the participants in this study reflect their perceptions of being “outsiders” (Delpit, 1997) rather than active collaborators in a university learning community. Walter Allen (1992) states, “On predominantly white campuses, Black students emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration” (p. 39). For example, the African American doctoral students did not feel that they were consulted or included on what they desired as culminating activity as syllabus implied that as a cohort they would decide as did other cohorts, who had taken the course prior. In addition, Rosemary agreed with James about being included in the discussions about what African American doctoral needs are: “We were asked on the evaluation survey for suggestions for future workshops I know I asked for the procedure to obtaining an advisor and that was never discussed in any of the workshops I attended.”

Lawrence shared that “We asked one professor about us getting together with other doctoral cohorts and the professor said they would make that happen, but it never did.” Lawrence, like other students in the program, “wanted to see more activities where we got together with other doctoral students.” In addition, the African American doctorates that were interviewed for this research study agreed that receiving their doctorate in educational leadership was their biggest adventure in lifelong learning skills, and despite the lack of support and disrespect that they experienced during their tenure in the program, and there is still a persistence to continue to support other African American doctoral students from their position of strength (Nettles & Millett, 2006; Waite & Crocco, 2004). Tiana recounts her time as a doctoral student and the importance of

academic support for program completion, “Getting through the coursework marked a triumph.” The African American doctorates admitted to developing the leadership skills of coping and surviving at a predominately White institution, which would assist current African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program (Bailey-Johnson et al. 2009; Patton, 2009).

Do social and academic interactions contribute to the success of African American doctoral candidates? The comments by African American doctoral students about their experiences and perceptions in the educational leadership doctoral program reinforce that social and academic interactions contribute to the success of African American doctoral students (Astin, 1982; Lewis et al., 2004; Tinto, 1975;). James stated, “If only they would show us they cared about our struggle and how important it is for us to graduate.”

Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) state, “When faced with the absence of mechanisms of support, the Black graduates believed that it was self-support that helped them through their graduate school experience” (p. 374). The findings in this study support the statement of self-support, by confirming the African Americans without any other recourse were forced to form informal groups, which sometimes had a negative effect on their academic achievement in the educational leadership doctoral programs coursework.

August University’s educational leadership doctoral program did a marketing campaign in the surrounding urban area to increase the opportunity for the diverse population of educators to attend the doctoral program (College Statistics, 2011a). The lack of general support that was expected cited by the African American participants in the study who responded to the marketing campaign and attended orientation sessions

indicates that the program faculty and administration were unprepared for the number of African American students enrolling. Therefore, I concur with Strickland (1975) when he states, “university policies which attract larger numbers of students are not geared to hold and support those students once they have arrived” (p. 202).

Several researchers link social and academic interactions with professors in doctoral programs to forming relationships with students during doctoral coursework (Brooks & Heiland, 2007; Felder, 2010; Gardner, 2009a). Further research indicates that faculty and doctoral student relationships that are formed early throughout coursework will lead into an advisory and/or mentor relationship, which is important for educational attainment of the terminal degree (Brooks & Heiland, 2007; Felder, 2010; Gardner, 2009a). The experience of support contributes to confidence and this will reflect the predominately White institutions commitment to an equitable and well-rounded doctoral educational experience (Allen, 1992; Felder, 2010; Nettles, 1990).

The findings suggest that when there is no systemic and sustaining support program that focuses on African American doctoral students’ social and academic interactions, African Americans form small support groups to “make meaning” (Fullan, 2007; Howard-Vital, 1989; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portilla, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). According to Fullan (2007), “meaning fuels motivation; and know how feeds on itself to produce ongoing problem solving” (p. 39).

Either way, Fullan (2007) implies that the opposite of making meaning is, “confusion, overload, and a low sense of efficacy – depleting energy at the very time that it is sorely needed” (p. 39). It is important that professors and advisors assist African

Americans in academic discourse in order understand and “achieve the ability to move between discourses (their cultural discourse), students from diverse backgrounds will be more likely to develop a stronger academic identity and succeed in the academy” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 303).

What are African American doctoral candidate’s perceptions about support needed to be successful in a doctoral program? I agree with the African American participants in the study that more support initiatives should be put in place and not just communicated at the orientation meet and greet. The African American doctoral students and doctorates have expressed during the interview process that “a supportive environment” would include knowing who their advisor was, and being able to meet with an advisor; knowing how to use the academic language required at the doctoral level; and understanding how to navigate university policy (Lewis et al., 2004, p.16).

In addition, creating mentoring and advising programs that would be specific to African American doctoral students’ needs, for example, in academic writing not just seminars in academic writing, but actual one to one advisors that relate to their success (Lewis et al., 2004). Brian gives an example about his personal experience with the leadership educational doctoral program,

I met this extraordinary professor during the educational leadership doctoral program orientation, and then this professor actually was one our teachers in the lit review course. I did not understand anything about what a lit review was, but this professor actually came over to our group and sat down with us and spoke to us in a way we could understand and the professor did not make us feel stupid when we asked questions.

Strickland (1975) states, “Success is required on the human level such that professional achievement is not largely associated with social isolation or distance as a result of which Black students see professionalism as snobbism” (p. 205). It is important

that after the educational leadership doctoral program's orientation for perspective doctoral students, the atmosphere of inclusion is reflected in the coursework.

How is Critical Race Theory (CRT) useful as a lens to understand African American doctoral candidate's experiences? When the question was asked about race and how this is related to their experiences and perceptions as African American doctoral students, responded saying that they preferred to express their feelings in a group, with a friend, or with a professor to whom they could speak in confidence rather than file a grievance or tell someone in the educational leadership doctoral program. This confirms Patton et al.'s (2007) study of "Critical race perspectives on theory in student affairs" and Ballard's (2010) study "Critical race theory as an analytical tool: African American male success in doctoral education" about the concerns and feelings of African American doctoral students in the leadership educational doctoral program. Patton et al. (2007) suggest higher education administration and faculty at predominately White institutions should "recognize how their knowledge, awareness, and racial identity influence their decisions, policies, and interactions with students from diverse backgrounds (p. 49). Ballard (2010) states, "CRT seeks to answer questions regarding racism congenital in educational procedures and practices in the U. S." (p. 16).

I agree with Fullan (2007) that there is "enormous difficulty of tackling the existing power structure and overcoming prejudice and ignorance of ethnic, class, gender, and special differences of all kinds" (p. 6). In addition, Fullan (2007) states, "The problem of meaning is central to making sense of educational change. In order to achieve "greater meaning, we must come to understand both the small and the big picture" (p. 8).

Rosemary referred to the subtle evidence of racism in the graduation requirements that are not clearly distinguished between graduate students and doctoral students as having “hidden undertones” of discrimination, which she cannot specifically pinpoint, but feels all the same. James referenced conversations that led to his perception of professors at the hybrid extension exhibiting covert racism in leadership educational doctoral program:

They were never as specific as they should have been in really sharing information that was pertinent in reference to the dissertation process of how things should work in order for you to obtain your terminal degree. I am sure they did not expect African Americans to ask why none of us are graduating as promised in three years.

Michelle described an experience and the perception of subtle racism by educational leadership professors during a visit to the main campus leadership educational offices:

There was no sense of community with the professors that travelled to the extension site to teach us. We always had perception the professors wanted to leave as quickly as possible, because they did want to be caught to late in the area maybe for the fear in a high crime area

In addition, “microaggressions occur in situations in which Whites, when discussing African Americans with another African American will utter phrases such as, you are not like other Blacks; I sometimes forget that you are Black; or you (Black) don’t act like them (Blacks)” (Ballard, 2010, p. 16). There are also counterstories, however, in which African Americans use microaggressions in situations to contradict how Whites use, or refer to “Black.” For example, Lawrence described a situation in which an African American doctoral student denied that anyone could tell if she was Black if they only listened to her voice, and did not look at the color of her skin, because she said she did not act like other Black people. Ballard (2010) states, “Counterstories were born out of necessity, they were created as a means of conveying stories of experiences that have not

been told, as well as a way to assess and counter dominant stories.” Johnson-Bailey et al. (2009) state, “White professor discrimination is defined by... subtle racism on the part of White faculty members...the actions described vary with respect to severity, all represent a breach in the trust and respect that characterize instructor-student relations during graduate education” (p. 188). Therefore, microgressions are used by both Whites and Blacks. Transformational changes in the leadership educational doctoral program will prevent African American doctoral students from accepting, tolerating, and accommodating issues that negatively affect their educational aspirations (Tatum, 1992; Fullan, 2007).

Challenging Racism in Doctoral Programs

Farmer (2003) warns African American doctoral students, “You will want to challenge assumptions rooted in the racism and cultural imperialism that is usually ignored. Know in advance, however, that in some situations you may have to pay a price for your assertiveness (aggressiveness to some)” (p. 93). Farmer shared his personal experience in a doctoral program in, “The Black Student’s Guide to: Graduate and Professional School Success” (Farmer, 2003). Dr. Farmer (2003) had questioned a professor for subtle covert remarks about African American intelligence, which the professor presented from research data about African Americans. The result of questioning the professor, Farmer (2003) states, “I thought I won that battle, I also thought that I should have gotten a higher grade for the course, but my self-esteem had received a needed boost” (p. 93).

Kozol (2005) and Allen (1992) attribute the rising cost of higher education is one of the many reasons why predominately White institutions are limited in what kind of

social and academic activities they can offer to African American doctoral students. Kozol (2005) insists, “As racial isolation deepens and the inequalities of education finance remain unabated and take on new and more innovative forms” (p. 2005) educational institutions have to make choices in the limited resources provided. Allen (1992) suggested, “a period of boundless expansion and optimism has moved into one of retrenchment and financial constraints, which is reflected in a dilution of higher education’s commitment to Blacks and other minorities” (p. 27). August university’s educational leadership doctoral program offers leadership courses that include prominent theoretical authors, but some professors, “overlook the extent to which Blackness is reflected not only in the meanings students bring with them to school but also in the meanings that are imposed on them by school structures” (O’Connor et al., 2007, p. 542). Moore and Toliver (2010) propose that universities:

Create a climate for candid campus discussions about race that permeate faculty-student communication through student-centered programs, as well as individual communication between ... advisors or mentors in which concerns about race can be continually explored and proactively addressed whenever problematic.
(p. 939)

Chapter VI

Implications and Recommendations

“Themes that unify...programs of research [and] the importance of supportive relationships and contents in the academic experiences of students placed at risk” may contribute to understanding the experiences and perceptions of African American students attending PWIs (Nettles, 2000, p. 49). Tatum (1992) states, “While it may seem easy for some students to challenge the validity of what they read or what the instructor says, it is harder to deny what they have seen with their own eyes” (p. 18). What I have heard through the voices of the African American doctoral students in this research study, suggests the need for “culturally appropriate ways of guiding them” through the doctoral program at a predominately White institution (Reddick, 2006, p. 93).

A research study conducted by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2009) indicated that African American doctoral students “were often stressed and anxious during their schooling” (p. 197). The interviews for this phenomenology revealed African American doctoral students’ perceptions of being attacked in the educational leadership program; their perceived battles; being defensive about their experiences, or mistakenly perceived experiences that would perhaps hinder their progress in the educational leadership doctoral program (Davis, 2007a; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001). In addition, interviews with African American doctoral students confirmed that they had strong educational aspirations, did not receive the general support they expected from the faculty of the educational leadership department and August University, felt disrespected and isolated, and were unaccustomed to the academic language and communication used

in the educational leadership doctoral program. In this chapter I suggest recommendations for August University to receive, communicate, and transfer information during academic coursework in the doctoral program, which could support the retention of African American doctoral students at this PWI (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

Implications

Among the findings of this study lies the warning that prospective African American doctoral students should “look before they leap” into programs that do not offer the kinds of social and academic supports they will need to successfully complete. At August University, doctoral students were disappointed in the supports available once they were enrolled in the program. Due to the lack of academic support, students failed to complete, or left the program after criticisms by certain faculty members. The importance of an academic advisor that can provide guidance in navigation program requirements was identified as essential to success as well. In addition, transactional policy changes would be disseminated more smoothly if the education department administrators and faculty could “ensure that graduate students are well represented as voting members on all relevant campus policy committees” (p. 53). Participation in policy and decision making, therefore, would also contribute to African Americans completing doctoral programs at August University.

Recommendations

Mentoring and support. Mentors and mentoring relationships are well documented (Schreiner et al., 2011), but there has been little research on university based mentoring programs (Brittian et al., 2009). Black student centers on predominately White

university campuses are usually geared toward accommodating Black undergraduates (Jones & Williams, 2006). For example, a pilot program called, “Compact for Faculty Diversity” at Columbia University, not only assists African American doctoral students, but all minority students with mentoring and financial assistance (Lewis, 2008, p. 2). The “Compact for Faculty Diversity” is a low cost program that supplements financially, mentors doctoral students of ethnically and diverse backgrounds, and most importantly assists doctoral students in navigating the social and academic interactions they face on a predominately White campus (Lewis, 2008). This program is just one approach to problem solving which suggests that “meaning fuels motivation; and know how feeds on itself to produce ongoing problem solving” (Fullan, 2007, p. 39).

Although there is not one solution to the social and academic problems for African American doctoral students at August University, for as Fullan (2007) suggests, change is “a complex social process” (p. 39), since the August University educational leadership doctoral program has four locations, there should be an advisor available at each site that can make a connection that is authentic and knowledgeable about the challenges of communication and the affect administrative policy has on African American doctoral students (Pontius & Harper, 2006). I suggest that powerful role models are important and needed for the African American doctoral candidates and doctorates that were interviewed, because the participants based their experiences, perceptions, and views on the professors and administration that were relative to their own social and academic backgrounds (Allen, 1992; Beeler, 1991).

Moore and Toliver (2010) conducted a pilot study with a focus group of 10 Black professors from two predominately White universities concerning the “interracial

dynamics of Black professors' and Black students' communication in traditionally White colleges and universities" (p. 932), which allowed the Black professors to express their experiences and perceptions of the predominately White universities' attitudes toward communicating with African American students. Although I agree with Moore and Toliver (2010) up to a point, I cannot accept the authors overall conclusion that, "a critical mass of Black students and faculty members is needed to help ensure the success of Black students, as well as faculty members" (p. 44). Moore and Toliver's (2010) research study overlooks what I consider an important point that I support as an African American. Joy Davis (2007a) also conducted a research study involving African American graduate students that suggested,

The majority of participants had positive mentoring experiences regardless of the mentor's race, students with non-White mentors expressed higher levels of inspiration and engagement in these relationships. The strength of same-race mentoring dyads suggests the importance of validation in the academic socialization process, yet does not minimize the importance of cross-race mentoring given the demographics of academe. (p. 227)

Nevertheless, new research shows, "a faculty member who is genuinely interested in a doctoral student's research agenda, professional development and degree completion can be important to an African American's degree completion regardless of race" (Davis, 2007b, p. 358). According to Nettles and Millett (2006), "in the fields of education, engineering, and the social sciences, having a mentor was positively related to degree completion as well as to a faster time to degree in the humanities and the social sciences" (p. xxii). In addition, I would agree with Nettles and Millett's (2006) research study findings that, "students with mentors felt more positive about their relationships with faculty both outside and inside the classroom" (p. xxii).

Retention and persistence. According to Tinto (1975, 1993), personal contact with academic professors, higher education administration, and personal development are key to success and retention in higher education. Similarly, Astin (1993) links academic and social interactions to persistence and degree completion. Based on the findings in this study, the university should consider making efforts to enhance the social and academic experiences of African American students enrolled on the doctoral program. By intentionally making efforts to positively impact the social experiences of African American graduate students, the university may experience an increase in retention and program completion for this population (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009).

Investigating and researching historical Black universities' retention process for African American doctoral students and investigating and researching successful predominately White institutions programs for retention and the completion of African American doctoral students would perhaps change the "predictability" of the organizational culture and leadership at August University (Jones & Williams, 2006; Schein, 2004).

There are research studies that delve into and make inquiries why African American doctoral students "leave before advancement to candidacy" (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 65). By following this line of investigation at predominately White institutions, the research can "inform policies and strategies for increasing graduate student retention by focusing on the interplay of institutional disciplinary, and student characteristics" (Nerad & Miller, 1996, p. 63).

What I Have Learned

I learned from listening intently to the African American participants in the interview process, and the conversations among African Americans that took place outside of the classroom. This information has transformed me personally, and will transform me professionally in the field of education. The first and foremost information comes from African American doctorates who have succeeded in obtaining their doctorate from a predominately White institution that corroborates existing current and past research about African Americans in a doctoral program.

The second point I have learned is from listening to doctoral students that have left the doctoral educational leadership program that is inspiring to me as a future African American doctorate from the educational leadership program at a PWI is that, “university administrators who handle issues of diversity develop programs to educate faculty... how the dynamics of their classrooms, curriculum are perceived, experienced by Black graduate students and that they develop systems for accessing the inclusiveness of campus activities” (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009, p. 198). The last stirring and moving moments were listening to the interviews of the current doctoral students and the expressions voiced by their participation in the leadership educational program at August University is that all, “participants indicate that they had a need to tell their stories” (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009, p. 198). I am confident that this research study could be used as a stepping stone to open dialogue on the discussion about African American doctorates and doctoral students’ experiences at August University.

Limitations

This research study was limited to a small group of 10 African American doctoral students and doctorates, which does not account for the majority of African American

doctoral students currently enrolled in the doctoral educational leadership program and the African American doctorates who completed their terminal degree at the predominately White institution (Felder, 2010). In addition, I did not have access to the total number of African American doctorates that completed the doctoral educational leadership program to make a comparison to the number African American doctoral students that entered the program, including the African American doctoral students that discontinued the program, and I did not have access to information regarding socioeconomic background of any student (Gardner, 2009a). Therefore, I agree with Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) that, “there is some limited understanding of this process of resistance that Black students engage in, especially within the classroom, there’s little understanding of acts of resistance students may engage in outside of the classroom and when interacting with their peers” (p. 521).

Conclusion

Listening to the needs of the participants in the research study contributed to my learning and enhanced my leadership platform. Goleman et al. (2002) refer to two types of leadership: resonance and dissonance. Resonant leadership “reinforces synchrony just as much as enthusiasm does, because it leaves people feeling understood and cared for” (p. 20). Whereas, dissonant leadership is “more subtle, using surface charm or social polish, even charisma to mislead and manipulate...their professed values, or they lack empathy, caring about little other than their own advancement” (p. 23). Therefore, what I learned through my research study is that I am, “not the only one who has experienced racism, discrimination, and paternalism while pursuing ... graduate degree” (Farmer, 2003, p. 93). I now understand why “...the activities of African American professionals must be primarily proactive rather reactive” (Farmer, 2003, p. 93). This means to me as

an African American doctoral candidate in a educational leadership program at a predominately White institution that “of course the battle against racism must be continually fought, but we must continue to draw upon our worldview and cultural assets in creative ways as we seek to develop the African American community” (Farmer, 2003, p. 93).

There are certain perceptions held by African American doctoral students and doctorates, which lead to a belief that there are different constraints put in place at PWIs to deter their access to the terminal degree (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Moore & Toliver, 2010). While predominantly White institutions rarely admit that there is any resistance in their programs, African American students at PWIs endure “a less overt form of racism referred to as ‘microaggressions,’ subtle and often unconscious racist acts that cumulatively add stress to the experience of people of color” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 511). This research study suggests that these are critical issues that should be addressed or changed through the policies that create the process of admitting and retaining African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Moore & Toliver, 2010). These conclusions, add weight to the argument that, “throughout your doctoral studies and your career, you will need to have a critical understanding of our collective experiences in the United States and learn to translate those experiences in productive ways that can enrich life as we know it” (Farmer, 2003, p. 367).

Final Reflection

In phenomenological research, Patton (2002) states, “that what is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world” (p. 106). My purpose in this research study was to listen to the African American doctoral students, and give

them “voice” by including their words, and through their words, interpret their experience in the educational leadership doctoral program at August University. Early in my study, I realized that I had to separate myself from being a participant-researcher as a doctoral candidate also enrolled in the program, in order to listen more objectively to the participants’ voices. The emotions I heard from the African American doctoral students during the interviews were intense and passionate about their doctoral process. The intensity that progressed throughout the interviews was not easy to listen to, because I knew that some of what African American doctoral students were saying would be unwritten. I must acknowledge that I made a decision to temper some of the words of the participants, as they were too explicit for my dissertation. Being so close to the subject of my study, I discovered that I could not take on any of the researcher roles of intervener, reformer, advocate, or friend (Glesne, 2006) and complete the study without compromising professional codes of ethics. On a personal level, I also understood that I had to keep my own head down to complete my research and practice reflective listening with the African American doctoral students as they spoke about the leadership educational doctoral program.

As I reflect on the study as a whole, it was incredibly hard to listen to the stories of the African American participants in the educational leadership doctoral program. Their stories told their experiences; their interpretation of those experiences include being silenced, keeping their heads down in order to finish, or sadly, having to leave the program. Through this phenomenological research study, I developed my own emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2002), including the capacity to empathize with the African American doctoral students’ experiences while translating them into themes that can

make a contribution to the larger body of research on supporting diversity in educational leadership doctoral programs.

Epilogue

Merriam-Webster (2012) defines epilogue as “a concluding section that rounds out the design of a literary work.” In summarizing my dissertation, there were five chapters in this phenomenological research study that explored the experiences and perceptions of African American doctorates and doctoral students enrolled in an educational leadership program at August University, a predominately White research institution. Chapter I introduced and described the historical interpersonal relationships African American students have had with the dominant race involving higher educational practices. In addition, Chapter I also points the reader towards the significance of the research study through the research questions. Chapter II is an organization of peer reviewed articles and the relevant texts from prior research on African American struggles of equality within predominately White educational institutions and their quest for support in handling issues of microaggressions. Chapter III provides a review of the qualitative method used to identify the African American doctoral students’ and doctorates’ experiences and perceptions in the educational leadership program. Chapter IV presents the themes that emerged from the interviews, which are the voices and expressions of the participants. In addition, Chapter IV also answers each research question through the voices of African American doctoral students. Chapter V concludes with implications and recommendations that are important in developing specific strategies to ensure success for African American doctoral students.

Personal Experience and Perception

My experience with this phenomenological research study has influenced my perception and my development as a transformational emotional intelligent leader, as a

researcher, and as a writer. The rigor that was demanded from me as a doctoral student in the educational leadership doctoral program by my mentor and advisor was essential and effective for my success at August University. My mentor and advisor worked together to make sure that I was equipped to solve every issue when navigating the obstacles of educational leadership administration, and provided clarity when I had questions about the dissertation process and the organization of the research study. Thanks to the open and honest access that I had with my mentor and advisor, my experience within the dissertation process was rigorous, educational, and fulfilling personally.

As I complete the dissertation process, however, I am concerned for the African American doctoral students that are still in the educational leadership program at August University. During my tenure as a doctoral student in the educational leadership program, a few of the more experienced African American doctoral students, myself included, served as mentors for our group, and to other African Americans outside of our group. Because of this experience with mentoring, I will continue to mentor future African American doctoral students. I still have a concern that the African American doctoral students that are continuing to pursue their educational aspirations will not have the privilege of connecting with a mentor or advisor who will support them with the authentic enthusiasm I received from my mentor and advisor. Perhaps the findings of this dissertation will initiate the conversation that might address this concern. My hope is that systemic, successful, and rigorous academic programs are created to meet the needs of African American doctoral students in the educational leadership program at August University.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. *I am interested in learning about the details of your doctoral program and your perceptions of experiences?*

Probes:

- Did (or Does) your coursework lay a good foundation for doing independent research?
- Did you (or Do you) understand the requirements in the doctoral program?
- Did (or Do) some of the papers and other hurdles (qualifiers, prelims, orals, etc.) seem arbitrary and unhelpful.
- Did (or Does) coursework give you a broad foundation of knowledge, including related fields and subspecialties?
- Is (or Was) your doctoral program highly flexible, and can (or could) you tailor the program to your needs and interests?
- Tell about your Benchmarks?

2. *Since you started (or while you were) your doctoral program, have developed clear understandings regarding what it takes to be a doctorate?*

Probes:

- Did (or Do) you understand the length of time you would be student?
- Did (or Do) you understand customary practices about determining, authorship of research papers: order of authors, who is included, etc.?
- Did (or Do) you understand customary practices for generating, handling, and using research data responsibly?
- Did (or Do) you understand customary practices for reviewing and refereeing academic paper fairly?
- Did (or Do) you understand customary practices for using copyrighted material or material written by others?

3. *Some universities provide resources and programs for doctoral student; tell me if what programs were available to you as doctoral student?*

Probes:

- Was (or Is) there an orientation for new graduate students in the program?
- Was (or Is) there a graduate student center (i.e., center with resources, hang out space)?
- Was (or Is) there a written policy on research misconduct?
- Was (or Is) there a person or office to help students explore options for action when the perceive abuse or misconduct in the doctoral program?

4. *Doctoral students select their dissertation topics in many different ways; tell me about your dissertation topic and the dissertation process?*

Probes:

- Was (or Is) your dissertation solely of your own choosing?
- Was (or Is) your dissertation topic related to work being done by your dissertation chair?
- Does (or Did) your dissertation chair have a special interest in your topic?
- Are you (or Were) you satisfied with the manner in which you chose your dissertation topic and the dissertation process?
- Does (or Did) your dissertation topic interests you a great deal?

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