Underrepresented Doctoral Students: The Cultural and Institutional Barriers that Hinder Their Ability to Graduate

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UNDERREPRESENTED DOCTORAL STUDENTS: THE CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS THAT HINDER THEIR ABILITY TO GRADUATE

by

Nancy Greer-Williams

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

ADVISOR: DR. VAN EDWIN COOLEY

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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It takes a village to raise a child and it takes more people than the village to get a person through their doctoral program. My village consists of my family, church family, friends, dissertation committee, people along the way who stood with me at difficult times and for those who were against me. I praise God for my spiritual growth through this process and I want to send a special acknowledgment to the “Spirit Riders” and my mentors who helped cement me to this path.

Nancy Greer-Williams
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CHAPTER I

UNDERREPRESENTED DOCTORAL STUDENTS: THE CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS THAT HINDER THEIR ABILITY TO GRADUATE

Introduction

The concept of higher education, specifically the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), originates back to the colonial era in this country (Boyer, 1990). A student who earns a Ph.D. has persisted through the educational pipeline and by virtue of this highest degree awarded, is deemed able to become a faculty member at a university, or a leader in research, government or industry (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). In the areas of race and ethnicity, America’s doctoral granting institutions have struggled to retain a diverse mixture of students and faculty members (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003; Viernes Turner, Myers & Creswell, 1999).

The good news is that students from African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian ethnicities are entering and matriculating doctoral degrees at higher percentages than at any other time in the history of higher education (Lovitts, 2001). The bad news is that these students continue to be significantly underrepresented in doctoral education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003).

Researchers have reported that approximately half of all students who enroll in a doctoral program will attrit or leave before they complete all requirements for a degree (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). However, for African American,
Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students, their attrition loss far surpasses the 50% estimated national attrition level (Council of Graduate Schools [CGS], 2004).

Compounding the issue of doctoral attrition is the lack of national, longitudinal studies of student completion at the Ph.D. level (CGS, 2004). The available statistical information related to underrepresented and mainstream doctoral students is generated through smaller and/or regional studies. A key reason for the lack of centralized national data in post-secondary institutions is related to the wide variance of operating procedures among doctoral granting institutions (NCES, 2004). Furthermore, the institutional policies among schools vary in how entering students are defined, completion rates are measured and described and non-enrolled students are classified who ultimately return and complete their Ph.D. degree. Thus, no standardized national data is available from doctoral granting institutions for length of enrollment, if a student drops out or temporarily leaves a program (CGS, 2004).

Factors Affecting Doctoral Student Outcomes

In response to the continuous mass departure of students from doctoral programs, experts have started to examine the human cost of attrition (Lovitts, 2001). For example, Merriam-Webster (2004) described attrition as an act of human weakening due to constant harassment, abuse, or attack. At a symposium on graduate student attrition, Dr. Mitchell-Kernan, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate Division, University of California spoke about the costs of attrition:
... We have the finest system of graduate education in the world, yet we are struggling with a variety of problems facing our pipeline to higher education. The loss of students from our system of higher education is assumed to be the loss of precious human resources. Not only does the student and his or her family lose their investments and their dreams, but also we as a society appear to lose the future value of the student. (1997)

Studies on factors surrounding doctoral student attrition tend to approach the causes of students' early departure in any of four ways. Some researchers (e.g., Blackwell, 1981; Byrd-Chichester, 2000; Hamilton, 2003; Klein, 2002; Pruitt, 1987; Wilson, 2004) examined the legal aspects of equal educational opportunities. Another group of studies investigated the impact of socio-economic factors on students' learning abilities (Blandin, 1994; NCES, 2003; Polakow, 1998; NIEH, 2004). A small group of studies (e.g., Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; CGS, 2004; Dore & Gore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997) focused on institutional and program factors controlled primarily by administrators and faculty. A fourth, considerably larger set of studies, examined the human dynamics of the cultures within the environment of higher education (Daniel Tatum, 1997; Dumais, 2002; Nieto, 2004; Mickelson, 2003; Owens, 2001).

The Council of Graduate Schools (2004) identified essential elements of a doctoral program that are more predicting of a student's ability to complete his or her program than the standard selection indicators currently used by graduate institutions, namely are grade point average (GPA) and/or the Graduate Records Exam (GRE). Institutional and program factors found to be better predictors include: the selection process, financial support and funding mechanisms, mentoring, program environment, curricular process and procedures, and research modes of individual fields.
Human dynamics within the organizational structure of universities were also found to be problematic for doctoral students. Lovitts (2001) examined interference due to the organizational culture within departments. Further, there are social structures and patterns of behaviors in higher education created among students, faculty, and administration that remain relatively unchanged from year to year such as the social tone of the department and the way newcomers are socialized (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003; Owens, 2001; Lovitts, 2001).

At the beginning of admittance to their programs, doctoral students are expected to have the socialization skills necessary to meet the social and academic demands of their graduate experience (Adler, Rosenfield, Towne, & Proctor II, 1998; Dumais, 2002; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Students’ success in the new environment is dependent on their prior learning and socialization patterns acquired in elementary, secondary, and undergraduate school experiences (Daniel Tatum, 1997; Dumais, 2002; Mickelson, 2003; Nieto, 2004).

Studies on the issues surrounding doctoral student attrition are lacking in several areas. First, previous research on doctoral attrition was often conducted without sufficient representation from African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students, partly because there simply are so few of them enrolled in doctoral programs (Association of American Universities [AAU], 1998; CGS, 2004; Lovitts, 2001). Secondly, those studies (e.g., Blackwell, 1981, 1987; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Census Bureau, 1990; Grigg, 1987; Pruitt, 1987) were conducted more than 10 years ago which are considered landmark studies that surveyed a sufficient number of underrepresented students. Consequently, the phenomenon of the
issues surrounding attrition from an underrepresented doctoral student’s standpoint remains undefined (Lovitts, 2001). Therefore, the next section describes some of the issues that distinguish underrepresented students from mainstream students.

Differences Based on Race/Ethnicity

*Educational Achievement and Attainment*

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2003) has revealed that the breach in educational achievement between Whites and African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American-Indian cultures has narrowed over the past few decades. However, differences still persist in the educational outcomes among mainstream and underrepresented students at all levels, kindergarten through Ph.D. (NCES, 2003; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

A significant deficit of underrepresented students was found within the fields of math, science, and engineering (NSF, 2003). Instead, underrepresented doctoral graduates were more than twice as likely as the mainstream student to be seeking degrees in education and theology (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). These imbalances within various fields of study are the wide variance and quality of pre-college career counseling students receive (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Several researchers (e.g., Ibarra, 2001; Jalomo, 2003; Nieto, 2004) examined the imbalance of students within graduate fields of study and found the problem to be caused by: racism, absence of pre-college career counseling, identity formation, and socialization factors.
The Impact of Sociological Factors

Some studies examined the socio-economic differences among African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian populations and White students. For example, the National Science Foundation (2003) reported that larger percentages of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American-Indian doctoral students are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to graduate with over $30,000 of accumulated debt. The same study found that Whites and Asians were more likely to graduate a doctoral degree debt free (NSF, 2002).

The Association of American Universities [AAU] (1998) summarized that unemployment among new doctorates of all ethnicities remained at a constant low. This fact means that graduates from underrepresented groups will have to be more diligent to find employment in light of the low predictors of the available positions in the academe. Researchers determined that despite years of affirmative action policies, underrepresented doctoral graduates were less likely than their White counterparts to be employed as full or associate professors in universities (NCES, 2003; Viernes Turner et al., 1999), and are more likely to be employed as assistant professors and instructors in community colleges. Moreover, Viernes Turner et al. (1999) found that faculty of color in higher education are more likely then their White counterparts to experience racial/ethnic bias in the tenure process. All of the aforementioned factors contribute to the underrepresentation of people of color in higher education (Moore Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Viernes Turner, 2002).

Poverty is another factor that divides Whites from underrepresented populations in the United States (NCES, 2003). Families burdened with high levels of
poverty also struggle with unemployment, health insurance, medical needs, and lower life expectancies, all of which contribute to lower educational attainment for their children (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Justiz, 1994; NIEH, 2004). Thus, the higher poverty levels for underrepresented students may be a contributing factor in the high attrition rates noted among these diverse groups (Leon, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

**Doctoral Degrees Conferred**

Data from 2000 reveals that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian graduates combined received fewer than 10% of all doctoral degrees conferred, while their White counterparts received over 61% of the doctoral degrees conferred (NCES, 2003). Such low enrollment of underrepresented students in doctoral programs compounds the loss of even one student may exert upon the total population output of doctoral degrees conferred (CGS, 2004; Ibarra, 2001; Lovitts, 2001).

Doctoral education is an important avenue for creating leaders in the fields of research, education, business, and policy. When it comes to underrepresented populations, the high attrition level among doctoral students seems incongruous with the need for the United States to establish a highly qualified pool of minority Ph.D. graduates to continue to compete in an increasingly multicultural and complex world (Leon, 2003).
Problem Statement

Underrepresented doctoral students, specifically African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian, have a significantly higher attrition rate than majority doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001). Research to date on this topic has focused on causes and barriers that can be attributed to mainstream groups, not on particular cultural barriers that may adversely affect doctoral persistence among underrepresented groups (CGS, 2004; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001). While the barriers for mainstream and underrepresented groups may be similar, there may also be unique factors that affect persistence among underrepresented groups which have not been researched.

Those barriers might include cultural issues such as racism, learning and identity formation, discrimination, lack of understanding the dominant group ways, lack of social capital, and socialization levels. Other barriers include institutional issues such as, the selection process, financial support, program environment, curricular process and procedures, and field-specific differences among disciplines. In addition, key support systems such as a mentor or a supportive program might be missing for underrepresented students. Unless or until such studies are undertaken, rates of attrition among underrepresented students will continue to rise to the detriment of well meaning institutional diversity initiatives, and to the detriment of individual students who attrite from their program of study (AAU, 1998; Blackwell, 1988; Leon, 2003).

To this end, this study examined the following research questions:
1) What are the key cultural barriers that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students encounter in their doctoral programs?

2) What are the key institutional barriers that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students encounter in their doctoral programs?

3) What are the key support systems that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students report as benefiting them in terms of completing a doctoral program?

The purpose of this investigation was to broaden existing research on higher education by focusing on the cultural and institutional barriers that underrepresented students encounter as they matriculate within a doctoral program. This research used a phenomenological approach to explore the causes of doctoral attrition, and hindrances to successful graduation for African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students as well as any support systems that appear to be working.

Rationale for the Study

Underrepresented students who enter post-secondary institutions are often disadvantaged because they have not had the same exposure to academic preparation, technology and counseling as their White counterparts (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Many African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian doctoral students may also be first-generation attendees and not accustomed to the operational systems within post-secondary institutions (Ibarra, 2001; Leon, 2003; Pruitt, 1987). The ways in which they have been socialized to the learning environment is different than their
White peers, and often these students’ success is hindered because of false expectations and conflicting obligations within higher education (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003; Smith & Moore, 2003).

More African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students are currently entering doctoral programs now than at any other time in the history of the Ph.D. (NCES, 2003). Despite such growth in enrollment numbers, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students continue to experience low representation rates in higher education (Mellon Foundation, 1993; NSF, 2001). As a group, these ethnic students are more likely than White students to be marginalized by institutional and sociological factors which leave them inadequately prepared for higher education: third and fourth generation poverty, lack of cultural capital, and their learning style differences (Blandin, 1994; Jalomo, 2003; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Studies found that no matter how successful they were in earlier grades, balancing these issues through the rigors of doctoral education becomes more challenging and affects their ability to complete their program (Austin, 2002; Leon, 2003; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Tierney, 1996).

Furthermore, the demands of doctoral education require that students be proficient in the basic graduate-level survival skills of time management, study, and research (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998). Students who are deficient in these skills must spend extra time and resources to compete with their peers (Austin, 1994). Students from other groups may have more access to the economic means through which these skills can be acquired. However, affording to pay for the extras is difficult for students
whose family income levels are marginalized because of poverty (Carnegie Foundation, 2001; NCES, 2003; NSF, 2004).

At the height of the educational pipeline, underrepresented doctoral students still encounter barriers such as understanding the socialization processes, communicating in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, understanding the matriculation process, contending with language barriers and inadequate financial support (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Leon, 2003; Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). As a result, these students often experience lack of success, which many times results in them leaving their programs before graduation (NCES, 2003).

Educational leaders have failed to build a bridge between underrepresented students' sociological and cultural factors and the hierarchy of higher education (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). This creates a major societal problem with the end result being underrepresentation in leadership positions, business, university, and government (Leon, 2003; Pruitt, 1987; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Thus, as we progress into the 21st century and consider the consequences of a lack of diversity in doctoral education, universities are challenged to develop strategies to recruit, retain and graduate doctoral students of color, and maximize their learning experiences (Acquire & Martinez, 1994; Leon, 2003; Zachary, 2000).

This investigation broadens existing educational research by bringing voice to the often muted voices of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. With this qualitative investigation, a comprehensive understanding of successful recruitment, retention, and mentoring of doctoral students of color emerges, and focuses on deficiencies in the doctoral educational process. Educational
administrators and leaders can use this information to develop policies to enhance the experiences and increase retention and graduation rates of underrepresented doctoral students. In addition, this study advances current educational theory on the dissertation process, assimilation, diversity, and mentoring by exposing gaps in the post-secondary educational system, which many underrepresented and majority students continue to fall through.

Methodology

This study collected the lived experiences of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students and turned them into conceptualized statements in an effort to understand the meaning of their experiences in post-secondary institutions. Phenomenological data was collected in focus groups and face to face interviews. The procedures in the interview sessions were based on the basic components of a phenomenological approach: (a) the researcher enters the field of perception of participants; (b) the researcher sees how participants describe the phenomenon and how they experience and live it; and (c) the researcher looks for the meaning of the participants’ experiences (Schram, 2003).

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) protocols were submitted and secured prior to conducting research at three universities. The participants were contacted through referrals, emails and a snowballing technique (Creswell, 1998). Eventually, 15 male and female Ph.D. students of color were selected to be participants based upon their ethnicity and knowledge of the phenomenon. Focus groups were used to unmask the complexities associated with underrepresented groups in
doctoral education (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thereafter, the researcher revisited participants in one-on-one meetings with specific questions relating to the phenomenon that arose from the focus group discussions. This interaction process took several repeat sessions until the deeper meaning of their experiences in post-secondary institutions surfaced. Chapter III provides a more detailed discussion of the methodology.

Data collected in the interviews was transcribed into text and underwent a thematizing process of reduction. This process resulted in an abundance of general themes, outlined in Chapter IV. After a review of the general themes several were found to be interconnected, redundant, and incidental. Thus another stage of reduction was conducted that reduced the general themes into phrases that described the lived experiences of underrepresented doctoral students in post secondary institutions.

Definitions and Terms

For purposes of this study the following definitions will be used:

Hispanic/Latino: represents people of Hispanic origin, i.e. Mexican American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Guatemalan, and Latin American (Ibarra, 2001).

Majority is White, non-Hispanic and Asian Americans (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

Students of color are students or citizens from the underrepresented populations (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

Underrepresented means persons of African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian descent (NCES, 2003).
Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation includes five chapters, a reference list, and appendixes. Chapter II contains a review of the related literature: (a) the problems unique to America’s emerging ethnic populations including: the myth of equal educational opportunities, low social-economic realities of underrepresented groups, and inadequate educational preparation; (b) institutional and program barriers to doctoral success including: the selection process, mentoring, financial support and funding mechanisms, program environment, and curriculum, processes and procedures; and (c) learning expectations in a hostile environment: the culture of graduate school, and identity and learning styles. Chapter III contains the presentation of the methods and procedures used to conduct this investigation. Chapter IV contains the thematizing, analysis, original and secondary themes and results of the data. Chapter V contains a summary, findings, limitations, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study. Finally, appropriate appendixes and references used are attached as concluding sections.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Attrition is described as an act of human weakening due to constant harassment, abuse, or attack (Merriam-Webster, 2004). The costs of attrition are identified as three fold and affecting the students' future plans of upward mobility, this nation's need for diverse leaders and the academy's need for a multicultural workforce (Moore Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

This literature review provides a context for the study of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. With the efforts to achieve diversity and equity in higher education, these students of color continue to have attrition rates substantially higher than their White counterparts (NCES, 2003). Some of the literature examined in this section is ten years old, such as AAU, 1993; Blackwell, 1981, 1987; Blandin, 1994; Bernstein & Eaton, 1994; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Census Bureau, 1990; Grigg, 1987; Hauptman & Smith, 1994; Justiz, 1994; Pruitt, 1987; Rendon & Nora, 1994. This research however, is significant because of their surveyed population and subject matter.

The first section is an overview of the problems unique to America's emerging ethnic populations, which include the myth of equal educational opportunities, economic factors and inadequate educational preparation. Delving beyond the
characteristics of ethnicities, however, researchers identified barriers to doctoral success which included: institutional/program characteristics; selection process; financial support and funding mechanisms; mentoring; program environment; curricular process and procedures; and research modes of individual fields that help students acclimate to the scholarly/academic world. Human factors in higher education that impede underrepresented doctoral students’ ability to persist to graduation were also examined.

Problems Unique to America’s Emerging Ethnic Populations

Thus, then and now, there stand in the South two separate worlds; and separate not simply in the higher realms of social intercourse, but also in church and school, on railway and street-car, in hotels and theatres, in asylums and jails, in hospitals and graveyards . . . the separation is so thorough and deep that it absolutely precludes for the present between the races . . . leadership of the one by the other. (Du Bois, 1903)

Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote The Souls of Black Folk over 100 years ago, a book of essays and fiction about being a person of color in the United States. Hamilton (2003) stipulated that Du Bois’ answer to structural inequalities in the world for people of color was their access to higher education and culture. These truths, lead into this section on an examination of the factors that distinguish African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian citizens from the mainstream America.

The Legal Challenges From Brown to Grutter

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural
values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (Chief Justice Warren, Brown v. Board of Educ., 347 U.S. 483, 1954, pp. 493-494).

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the above case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas that the principle of “separate-but-equal” facilities in schools was unconstitutional (Blackwell, 1981). The unanimous Court decision decreed jurisdictions in the land to embark on a desegregation plan for public schools “with all deliberate speed” (Blackwell, 1981; Brown v. Board of Educ., 1954). In the judgment, The Court, determined that African American children were apt to generate feelings of inferiority when forced to attend segregated schools and those feelings had long-term, lasting effects on “their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone” (Brown v. Board of Educ., 1954, pp. 493-494; Klein, 2002).

As groundbreaking a decision as the Brown v. Board of Education was, the decree was often criticized for its failure to eliminate racial disparity in public and higher education (Wilson, 2004). Klein (2002) alleged that the Brown decision was not intended to address all the problems associated with the disparate academic achievement of African American students. He exclaimed further, that the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Educ., (1954) focused on de jure segregation; a specific type of segregation that provided separate facilities (schools, buses, physical plant, curriculum, etc.) for minority groups. Klein (2002) concluded that school districts would have eliminated all racial disparities traceable to de jure segregation. The present day school disparity would be less traceable because of its relationship to social or
economic factors, often beyond the control of the school districts (Klein, 2002). Furthermore, despite the small victory of integrated classrooms and facilities, history found the resistance to the desegregation order, fierce and compliance still not achieved.

Pruitt (1987) found that the declaration to dismantle segregation in higher education did not occur until *Adams v. Richardson* (1972). The *Adams* case was filed in 1970 against the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]. The organization's Legal Defense and Education Fund filed a series of legal assaults on the national level in order to focus attention on the inequalities in graduate education. The claim, brought forth in *Adams* was that the HEW (later changed to the Department of Education) had failed to implement and enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, against colleges who continued a policy of racial discrimination. The Supreme Court entered an executive order in 1973 (known as The Texas Plan), which required the HEW to investigate higher education institutions in six states and to issue guidelines for desegregation efforts in those states (*Adams v. Richardson*, 1972; Pruitt, 1987). Pruitt (1987) stated that the *Adams* ruling was later applied to all states with dual operating systems for Whites and Blacks. Pruitt (1987) determined that this legislation was the landmark ruling to provide equality of access throughout the land in employment, higher education, and other fields.

Byrd-Chichester (2000) found that the litigation backlash to *Adams* by Whites was immediate and created a chilly climate towards affirmative action in the United States. The aggressive campaign of challenges to desegregation and other race-

Several studies criticized the Supreme Court and the *Bakke* ruling for creating an era of confusion regarding diversity and how to effectively achieve it in higher education (*Blackwell*, 1981; *Byrd-Chichester*, 2000; *Perez*, 2001; *Wilson*, 2004). Further, the litigation challenge to eliminate race-conscious considerations spread to fields outside higher education, e.g., minority contracting, voting rights, employment and more (*Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Pena*, 1995; *Byrd-Chichester*, 2000; *Hopewood v. Texas*, 1992). *Blackwell* (1987) stated the Supreme Court had grown increasingly conservative and negative in its decisions toward affirmative action, post-*Bakke*. *Perez* (2001) found three questions regarding affirmative action that the Court post-*Bakke* had remained silent on: (a) what were the precise contours of the remedial justification for affirmative action in higher education; (b) is the diversity rationale viable, and (c) an example of a narrowly tailored affirmative action program?

The most recent Supreme Court ruling regarding race-based admission was the *Grutter v. Regents of the University of Michigan* (2002). The Court ruled that a university's desire for a diverse student body was a sufficient, compelling interest for
them to adopt a race conscious admissions policy, and ordered that the University of Michigan’s law school admissions program was constitutional (Springer, 2004). The order, however, found that the undergraduate program was unconstitutional because it awarded admissions points to minority applicants based solely on their ethnic status (Springer, 2004). Wilson (2004) criticized the Grutter ruling as hypocritical and said the Court’s action made the following statement to the World:

...the United States is aware of its racial problems and doing something to solve them. However, in the ‘real’ United States...the Black and Latino poverty rate is nearly 25% and increasing; and Black are the most segregated of all racial groups in housing and schools. (p. 7)

The order to desegregate public schools was rendered in the Brown v. Board of Education decision. The order was specific and directed at ending disparate facilities in public education (Klein, 2002). The Supreme Court since Brown has not been so specific on issues surrounding equal education for all American citizens (e.g., Adams v. Richardson, 1972; DeFunis v. Odegaard, 1971; Fordice v. United States, 1992; Grutter v. Regents of the University of Michigan, 2002; Cheryl J. Hopewood, et al. v. State of Texas, et al., 2000; Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978). The silent stance of the highest Court on a specific plan to desegregate has caused several problems in schools and organizations, such as, confusion in the enrollment of ethnic groups and confusion in hiring practices.

Since the ruling of the Brown v. Board of Education in the early 1950's, other changes were happening within the citizenry of America. Namely, the demographic changes were fundamentally transforming American society from a majority being White to predictions of the majority group being people of color before the end of the
21st century (U.S. Census, 2000). The researchers in the next section examined the social problems associated with the transforming society of this nation.

**Low Socio-Economic Realities of Underrepresented Groups**

Blandin (1994) found that by virtue of all statistical measures of income, opportunity, education, and access to health care, underrepresented citizens “do not begin to enjoy anything close to parity with the life experiences of the average White American” (p. 25). Moreover, history has revealed many attempts by the federal, state and local government to remedy economic disparity by race/ethnicity; regrettably have failed (Blandin, 1994). The literature uncovered the socio-economic realities for African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian citizens in the United States.

On the brink of the 21st century, a report from the NCES (2003) found that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian citizens continued to struggle with income and job disparities. The recent poverty ratio cited in 2000 for African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos was more than twice the rate for Whites (NCES, 2003). The statistical data also revealed that children from these ethnicities were particularly plagued; with 31% of African American children and 28% of Hispanic/Latino children living below the poverty level (NCES, 2003). Statistical data on the American Indian population have averaged them together with Alaska Native populations because of their relatively few numbers, making interpretations just for American Indians difficult (U.S. Census, 2000). The U.S. Census (1990) surveyed
data from the American Indian group as a single unit and discovered that more than 25% lived in poverty.

Miller (1998) indicated that to rightly discern the effects of poverty, the term must be divided into two sub-groups: long-term (generational) and short-term (situational). Generational poverty was found to describe groups of people who lived under the poverty index indicator for 8 years or longer. Situational poverty was used as a descriptor of persons whose incomes fell below the poverty indicator for short periods of time, under two years, and for specific issues e.g. (loss of job, an injury, etc.).

Of all of the ethnic groups in general poverty, Whites were the most likely to raise their incomes above the index and remained out of generational poverty. African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Native Americans, on the other hand, were found to be affected by generational poverty for longer periods (Miller, 1998). The following sections will outline and explain the potential risk factors associated with poverty.

Blandin (1994) remarked that the inner-city underclass were marked by second to fourth generation poverty, likely to be an early school dropout, functionally illiterate and raised in a household headed by a single-woman (p. 29). Further, the ethnic groups that made up the inner-city urban class were composed mainly of the African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian people.

Polakow (1998) examined chronic poverty and discovered that many households were headed by poor, single mothers; these factors she determined were instrumental in making chronic poverty pervasive throughout this nation's urban and rural communities. She noted these family structures remain in a constant state of flux.
because of low household wages and a lack of widespread, affordable housing. She further found that these single, female-headed units were unstable and many in a homeless status because of the family fleeing domestic violence (Polakow, 1998).

Another growing social problem in American society is health of its citizens. A recent report by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) (2004) compared life expectancy and health status among African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, American Indians and Whites and found that underrepresented groups with low incomes: (a) experienced shorter life spans; (b) plagued with long-term chronic illnesses; (c) higher rates of cancers, birth defects, infant mortality, asthma, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease; (d) more likely to live near or work in hazardous locations; and (e) there were more pollution-intensive industries and hazardous waste sites near communities where the majority of residents are underrepresented and poor (p. 1).

African Americans more than any other group were found to have the highest rate of low birth rates infants (NCES, 2003). Furthermore, more than 25% of the Hispanic/Latino and African American populations were not covered by health insurance (NCES study, 2000). Justiz (1994) suggested that lack of medical insurance prolonged poor health and added more numbers to generational poverty. Additionally, lack of medical insurance proved to be the source of inadequate nutrition, inadequacy of health care providers, and low functioning in work and school.

This section addresses issues in the American labor market that adversely have affected African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian families (NCES, 2003). For example, data from the U.S. Department of Education (2003) revealed that
the African American poverty rate had hit its lowest level ever, with African Americans twice as likely as Whites to be unemployed. African American and Hispanic/Latino men with college degrees also earned less than their White counterparts (NCES, 2003). The unemployment rate in some American Indian communities ran as high as 50%; which was double their unemployment rate at the height of the Great Depression (NCES, 1998).

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) (2003) estimated that two million persons have given up the job search and, as a result, are not counted in the national unemployment rate statistics. Thus, when the forecast of labor forces was reported, 2 million workers were not included, which gives an inflated picture of the unemployment status for workers from each underrepresented group. The truer unemployment picture for these ethnic group members is that their predicted recovery from joblessness is expect to lag behind Whites at a 20 month pace (EPI, 2003).

Another disparity that affected underrepresented families more than Whites was the prevalence of imprisonments (Justiz, 1994). The U.S. Department of Justice’s (2004) report on the federal prison population estimates that 5.6 million adults have served time in State or Federal prison, and of that number 63% were African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian.

The literature in this section revealed that America’s growing diverse ethnic populations have social problems, different than Whites that impact their resources such as, generational poverty, family structures, chronic health, unemployment, and imprisonments. The next section will expand the discussion to the educational
system; the research will examine the status of African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, American Indians and Whites in kindergarten through graduate levels.

Inadequate Educational Preparation

Ineffective School Policies

The conventional norm to measure all other groups in this country is based on the White, upper-middle class, English-speaking, male values (Landsman, 2001). The superior standard of the White male filters across the school environment, the curriculum, the education most teachers received, and the communication interactions among teachers, students and the community (Nieto, 2004). In spite of the aforementioned affirmative action policies, the literature in this section found socio-economic status and racial characteristics were variables that determined the quality of education received in this country (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Such variation produced different educational outcomes among underrepresented and White students in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions (Lovitts, 2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

Nieto (2004) discovered that many White teachers in a multicultural classroom adopted a “color-blind” philosophy to ward off being labeled a racist. She suggested that their mannerisms and refusal to acknowledge the cultural and racial differences in students were similar to someone seeing defects or inferiorities in their multicultural students. Other studies (Austin, 2002; Justiz, 1994; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997) found that each level of unequal preparation further compromised the students’ ability for
success at higher levels in the educational pipeline. Seymour and Hewitt (1997) inter-
viewed African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students who gradu-
ated at the top of their classes from predominantly minority high schools. These 
same students, in their first years in college, were perplexed and confused at their 
struggles to compete with their White peers; many lost confidence in their success in 
graduate school (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997).

African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian parents send their 
children to school to learn and be successful in the world (Dumais, 2002). The reality 
for underrepresented children was that they were often forced into a setting where 
they were not the majority and were confronted by teachers and staff that held preju-
dices and unjust beliefs about their race (Landsman, 2001).

*Student/Teacher and Staff Policy*

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2001) revealed that of the 47.7 
million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools at that time: (K-
12) 61.2% were White, 17.2% were African American, 16.3% were Hispanic/Latino 
and 1.2% were American Indian. In contrast, Nieto (2004) and Yasin (1999) examined 
the characteristics of the teacher population in K-12 and estimated that the majority 
(90.7%) of teachers are White, while African Americans comprise only around 7% of 
the teacher population.

In another study, Holloway (2000) examined the race/ethnic ratio of the ele-
mentary and secondary principals in the United States: 85% were White, 10% were 
African American, and 4% were Hispanic/Latino. Nieto (2004) summarized the
situation as juxtaposed: As the population of diverse students increased the percentage of European-American principals, teachers, and support staff increased to over 90%. For the other ethnic groups the numbers of multicultural teachers, principals, and support staff declined to under 10%.

This section addresses the consequences on the future educational outcomes of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian children when placed in institutions (schools) where oppressed policies and practices are reinforced and legitimized. Research has discovered that students of color were more likely to be suspended, victims of corporal punishment, and receive negative treatment for their behaviors in class than White students (Landsman, 2001; Nieto, 2004; Pollard, 2002). Pollard (2002) reasoned the negative treatment was based on the perceptions of White teachers—that African American and Hispanic/Latino boys are aggressive and violent. Nieto (2004) found that many times the teachers’ interpretations of student behavior were culturally biased.

Landsman (2001) surveyed her fellow White teachers and implied that fear and lack of cultural understanding was the cause of the majority of reprimands. For example, “During teacher training we are taught primarily to work with White, middle-class students, so when we come to teach classes and find a majority of Black, American Indian, or Hispanic/Latino students in front of us, we are unnerved at first, sometimes uncomfortable” (Landsman, 2001, p. 139).

Rone (2002) surmised that students of color, who encountered attitudes of low expectations, were at risk of being rendered “invisible” in the classroom. In her study, Rone (2002) concluded that all students were at the highest risk of being
influenced by a teacher’s negative attitude during the turbulent, transitional years between elementary and high school. However, students of color were more apt to encounter an unfavorable classroom situation. For example, a teacher forms implicit assumptions (based on stereotypical beliefs) that underrepresented students were low achievers and labeled them as “at risk”. Students who were aware of their teachers’ low expectations of them were more apt to exhibit behaviors and attitudes in that confirmed the teachers’ expectations. If, on the other hand, the student was found to be excelling in school, many times the teacher would not offer the student any additional assistance based on the assumption that the student was defying the “norms” of their race and did not need help (Rone, 2002).

The School Culture

Justiz (1994) examined the trends of students who lived in urban areas and found they were more likely to attend segregated schools that were overcrowded, have inadequate counseling, have an increased emphasis on vocational-technical education than on college, and be taught by faculty with low teaching credentials. In another study, C. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) identified urban schools as “fields of endangerment” because the people who attended and worked there were more concerned with survival than learning. Many schools in urban areas were dilapidated and unkempt, located in neighborhoods troubled by drugs, prostitution, gangs, and riddled with ethnic tension (C. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Another issue in urban schools identified by the NCES (2002) was increase in violence in both elementary and secondary schools.
The literature identified school policies and practices in elementary and high school that were established to help underrepresented students. The reality resulted in these ethnicities being segregated into special programs and classes that often hindered their future education (Leon, 2003; Landsman, 2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). One such practice identified by Nieto (2004) was tracking, which is the placement of students into groups perceived to be of similar ability, in various subjects (e.g., reading groups in self-contained classes, a low-level math group). Nieto (2004) said that tracking decisions were influenced by racial, ethnic, and social class differences and that the process was used to determine who would have access to gifted and talented programs.

Being held back was another institutional barrier that affected underrepresented students more than White students (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). The National Science Foundation (NSF) (2004) and NCES (2003) reported that although White students were more likely than African American and Hispanic/Latinos students to graduate from high school, the gap for African Americans was narrowing. But the same study, found that Hispanic/Latinos dropped out of high school at nearly triple the rate of White students and double that of African Americans, however (NCES, 2003; NSF, 2004).

Nieto (2004) said that many African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students encountered biased attitudes and were more likely to be suspended and victims of corporal punishment than White students, which made them more likely to leave school. Lastly, Nieto (2004) summarized that many
underrepresented students found that the system failed them, which caused them to become uninvolved, alienated, and discouraged by the school atmosphere.

A study by Darder, Torres, and Guiterrez (1997) compared expenditures per pupil among school districts in this country and determined that there was a wide variance in expenditures among districts—as high as double per student. The local wealth of citizens determined what and how students were taught, the curriculum, remedial help, and extra curricular activities offered (NCES, 2000; Darder et al., 1997). Thus, underrepresented students were more likely than Whites to live in poorer school districts with access to inferior or less services (Darder et al., 1997).

The Community College Experience

The literature in this section examined the higher educational trends of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian high school graduates. More than 10 million students were enrolled in the approximately 1,200 community and technical colleges in the United States (NSF, 2003). Hauptman and Smith (1994) stated that community colleges were attractive to many students because of their low-cost, open-admission policies, and flexible schedules. Moreover, Hauptman and Smith (1994) indicated that community colleges were labeled the college of necessity—rather than the college of choice—for students with inadequate preparation and limited financial-aid resources.

Jalomo, (2003) noted that community colleges served to bridge the necessary academic skills a student needed for transfer to a four-year college. A report from the Chronicle of Higher Education (2001), estimated there were higher concentrations of
Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students in community colleges than any other racial/ethnic group.

Bernstein and Eaton (1994), Grigg (1987), and Jalomo (2003) indicated that the community-college experience hindered the progress of underrepresented groups in higher education. For example, Jalomo (2003) indicated many African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students made questionable progress in community colleges. They indicated the problems could be linked to the following institutional barriers: Lack of tutoring assistance, excessive enrollment in remedial classes, ineffective teaching styles, a few professors of color, limited office hours, and a curriculum that minimized multicultural perspectives (Jalomo, 2003).

Grigg (1987) also examined institutional defects in two-year colleges and found there were three critical stages in which more students of color dropped out of school: (1) Between leaving high school and enrollment in a community college system, (2) at the completion of the Associate of Arts (A.A.) and subsequent transfer to a university, and (3) the retention of transfer students to the university. In a similar research study, the NSF (2004) estimated that of the large numbers of underrepresented students who enrolled in community colleges, relatively few earned associate’s degrees and fewer entered the SME fields.

Seymour and Hewitt (1997) indicated that the community-college system hindered more underrepresented students interested in future careers in the fields of science, math, and engineering (SME). In their study, they surveyed African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian transfer students and found that their community college experiences—specifically the curriculum, facilities, and advising—did
not adequately prepare them for SME careers. Nevertheless, the results of the NSF (2004) indicated that community colleges remained the primary means of transfer for underrepresented students to a four-year college/university.

Harvey and Williams (1996) examined the lower ratio of African Americans in community colleges and found a significant number enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). They also found that HBCUs were proven to provide African American students with supportive environments, academic growth and development, and positive psychosocial reinforcement (p. 233). The positive reinforcements at this critical juncture of their growth made HBCU graduates better prepared for life outside of academe (Harvey & Williams, 1996).

Student Transfer Experiences

Bernstein and Eaton (1994) examined the undergraduate transfer system and concluded that there were problems for all students, underrepresented and White, who desired to matriculate a baccalaureate degree. However, they suggested that African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students were more likely than White students to be burdened with problems upon transfer. Jalomo (2003) examined this issue and said the aforementioned institutional shortcomings make the transfer process for underrepresented students both confusing and frustrating.

Rendon and Nora (1994) examined characteristics of African American transfer students and determined that they were more likely to delay the undergraduate process for more than four years after having finished high school. Entering African American students were also older than students in any other race/ethnic group and
more of them made the decision to transfer to a university after having left community college. Of those who transferred, nearly three out of four students lost college credits and African Americans were the least likely to pursue a non-science field.

Santos and Rigual (1994) found that the progress of Hispanic/Latinos in higher education was dependent on their English-speaking ability and length of residence in the United States. Those two characteristics, individually or in combination, had the most influence on standardized test scores, readiness for college-level work in English, and college participation rates. Duran (1996) examined the consequence of two other factors on college achievement for the same undergraduate group and determined that high-school grades and admissions test scores were the least accurate in predicting college success. The studies found that most Hispanic/Latino students' sociocultural characteristics, educational experiences, and early educational aspirations were different from White students (Nieto, 2004; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Thus, Duran (1996) suggested that the higher-education community needed measures other than grade point average (GPA) and Graduate Records Examination (GRE) scores to determine Hispanic/Latino students' future success in education.

Seymour and Hewitt (1997) found notable contrasts in the socialization styles during their transfer to higher education among American Indians raised in urban areas and those from reservations. Those raised on reservations were more subject to the culture shock. Those who were raised in urban areas didn't have a tribal connection and searched for a connection and sense of belonging. Either way—raised on a reservation or urbanized—American Indian students performed poorly in classroom
contexts that demanded individualized performance, public presentations, and emphasized competition (Nieto, 2004).

The research in this section has revealed that public education policies in elementary, secondary and undergraduate levels promote behaviors that impact the successful outcomes of underrepresented students. For example, underrepresented students were more likely to attend a school administrated by a White principal and staff; taught by a White, female; and work from a curriculum based on the White male upper-middle class value system (Holloway; 2000; Landsman, 2001; NCES, 2001; Rone, 2002. These factors turned into cultural and institutional barriers for African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian students. As a result of the aforementioned barriers, these children, youth, and young adults were more likely than their White counterparts: (a) victims of corporal punishment; (b) placed in special education; (c) tracked into lower-level classes; (d) receive inadequate college counseling; (e) drop out of high school; and (f) attend community college and then transfer to a college (Leon, 2003; NCES, 2003; Nieto, 2004; NSF, 2003; Pollard, 2002; Rone, 2002).

The studies in the next section explored the progress of underrepresented and dominant group students in post-secondary schools. Researchers have reported that approximately half of all students who enroll in a doctoral program will attrit or leave before they complete all requirements for a degree (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). However, for African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and American Indian doctoral students their attrition loss far surpasses the 50% estimated national attrition level (CGS, 2004; Lovitts, 2001).
Post-Secondary Institutional and Program Barriers

The literature in this section addresses institutional idioms in higher education that greatly influence doctoral student completion rates. The Council of Graduate Schools (2004) indicated the very nature of doctoral education was different for entering students and posed greater challenges for them to overcome than they had faced on prior levels. In a study on doctoral education, the Carnegie Foundation (2001) indicated the causes of attrition were not necessarily linked to a lack of academic skills but more to a lack of integration into the department. The broad themes discussed are the selection process, financial support and funding mechanisms, mentoring, program environment, curricular process and procedures, and research modes of individual fields that help students acclimate to the scholarly/academic world.

The Selection Process

The Ph.D. selection process was described as double sided, with both the student and the department giving their input on the terms of acceptance in hopes of making the perfect fit (CGS, 2004). The Council of Graduate Schools (2004) examined such processes and said that academic departments select students based on demonstrated abilities, credentials, talent, and potential. Other factors that influenced department selection of students were based on the number of students who left or matriculated in the previous year, the number of graduate faculty members, and the availability of graduate assistantships (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992).
Lovitts (2001) defined students’ strategies for selecting a Ph.D. program. Typical candidates compared programs and departments based on their prestige, examined the compatibility of their research interests and the faculty in the department, read faculty members’ papers, and actually visited the graduate school.

There was a plethora of research that uncovered problems in the “perfect fit” equation among doctoral programs and students. For example, Golde and Dore (2001) found that many students enrolled in their doctoral programs with only a vague idea of what the process entailed and/or with unclear reasons for their decision. Lovitts (2001) revealed that a prospective doctoral student was more likely to select a department or program based on the school’s reputation rather than their own opinion. Golde and Dore (2001) also indicated that many students failed to ask faculty members questions regarding the doctoral process or research fellowships.

The Minority Selection Process

The enrollment trend used by many underrepresented students was identified as a high-risk strategy because the prospective student only applied to one or two doctoral programs (Ibarra, 2001). Often African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students were hindered by departmental reluctance to accept them based on low GRE scores and lack of sufficient financial support (Ibarra, 2001). The Association of Graduate Schools (AAU) (1993) found that the enrollment levels for African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and American Indians in all Ph.D. fields were significantly less than the enrollment levels of White students. They concluded that
underrepresented ethnicities were not pursuing doctoral education in proportion to their presence in the overall population (AAU, 1993).

Blackwell (1981) reported that the underrepresentation of ethnicities in higher education was due to negligence of graduate schools to mount well-organized, systematic, recruitment programs designed specifically for students of color. Most Ph.D. institutions relied upon their reputations and brochures with empty pronouncements of being an “equal opportunity” institution to target minority groups (Blackwell, 1981). Another factor that led to underrepresentation in doctoral education was the failure of many African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students to satisfy the requirements on the GRE and other entrance exams (Blackwell, 1981).

The standard procedure for collecting racial/ethnic data on enrollment forms involved the student self-selecting one of the five federal categories: (1) American Indian or Alaskan Native; (2) Asian or Pacific Islander; (3) Black, not of Hispanic origin; (4) Hispanic; and (5) White not of Hispanic origin (NCES, 2004). Nieto (2004) found that many differences, which were not apparent on the enrollment forms, existed among ethnic groups. Ethnic group members could share basic cultural values and historical experiences but could be quite different from each other. For example, Latinos could originate from Guatemala or a person from the Dominicans could have African characteristics and background. Ibarra (2001) added that a Hispanic could represent Spanish, Mexican-American, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban-Americans, Latino, as well as others of Hispanic origin. Lumping together ethnic group members for the dominant group classification system had sociopolitical implications for many students (Ibarra, 2001). Moreover, whatever ethnic
classification the student chooses, follows them through out their academic career, which could mean being treated as a minority e.g., second-class status, victimization, and injustice (Ibarra, 2001, p. 95).

When Latinos and other underrepresented students enter higher education, they are often viewed through a system that places them the aforementioned categories, which are associated with certain characteristics (Ibarra, 2001). Leon (1993) found that few Whites were aware of all the ethnic distinctions among and within underrepresented groups and often made stereotypical assumptions and remarks that further alienated students.

In summary, this literature discovered several shortcomings within the standard selection processes for underrepresented students. For example, a few studies (AAU, 1993; Blackwell, 1981) discovered that these students are under enrolled in doctoral programs. Several researchers discovered that the standard enrollment form was not sufficient to access diverse student characteristics or needs (Ibarra, 2001; Leon, 2003; NCES, 2004; Nieto, 2004).

**Mentoring Relationships**

Mentors are guides . . . They lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way. (Daloz, 1999, p. 18)

Kochan (2002) indicated that mentorship means different things to different people. Some people view it as a relationship while others see it as an avenue to promotion. Mentorship is a complex process that encompasses many different styles,
definitions, and approaches. Moreover, Kochan (2002) proposed that finding the most effective mentor relationship was dependent upon the protégé’s needs, which could be personal or professional, self-determined or mandated and structured by someone other than the protégé. Mertz and Pfleeger (2002), discovered mentor relationships at the corporate level were not only used as an avenue to advance less experienced members to higher level positions in the organization but also used as a strategy for enhancement, recruitment, retention, and increased job satisfaction.

Harris (2002) focused on the specific benefits of mentoring in higher education. Overall, at the graduate level, she concluded that students with a mentor had a higher rate of involvement in professional activities, higher grades, more scholarly research activities, and publications than students who lacked mentors. Graduate students in the Harris (2002) study said that they needed a mentor for encouragement, guidance, shared experiences, a role model, and communication with another person. The conventional model of mentoring in higher education was the apprenticeship style, with the advisor as the mentor and the student as the protégée (Carnegie Foundation, 2001). However, Daloz (1999) determined that the conventional faculty advisor is more interested in the protégé’s academic needs, whereas a mentor is involved in the protégé’s personal and professional needs. The Carnegie Foundation (2001) reported that most prospective students do not know much about the process of doctoral education and would need the help of a mentor to know how to navigate the system.

Researchers have examined mentor relationships and the factors that hinder successful interactions and the resulting effect on the educational outcomes of
students. Mertz and Pfleeger (2002) reported that cross-cultural mentor relationships did not work if the mentor (usually from the mainstream group) viewed the protégée as less qualified because of his or her race/ethnicity or gender. Further, Mertz and Pfleeger (2002) suggested the results of their study revealed that formal mentoring programs established to benefit underrepresented groups were often scrutinized by others in the organization. As a result, a lack of success in one mentor relationship had a negative effect on all future cross-cultural mentor pairs (Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002).

Harris (2002) stated that while the effectiveness of mentoring relationships in higher education is well documented, the prevalence of such relationships remained relatively scarce, especially for underrepresented groups. Blackwell (1981) found a strong correlation between lack of interest to attend graduate school and the lack of a mentor. In a subsequent study on African American graduate students, Blackwell (1987) discovered that students who were aided during graduate school by advisors, teachers, or another peer, a miniscule number of respondents scored sufficiently high on the mentor scale to be categorized as a participant in a mentor-protégé relationship. Blackwell (1987) also discovered that older, White males served as mentors twice as often as African American males and the majority of African Americans in the study did not have mentors during their graduate school experience.

Greer-Williams (2001) indicated that issues of race and social background differences were difficult for cross-cultural mentor pairs to overcome without some form of formal intervention. Kochan (2002) determined that for underrepresented students, the absence of a mentor meant missed opportunities for collaborations with faculty and, as a result, fewer publications than their White counterparts. Seymour
and Hewitt (1997) reported that attrition occurred most in underrepresented students who had high GPAs with the reason being the lack of an essential role model. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) said there were not sufficient numbers of underrepresented faculty members in higher education to be role models.

Viernes Turner (1999) found that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian faculty members desired to be role models and mentors but struggled to balance extreme instructional loads, research projects, and being the “token” ethnic representative often called on by the department to advise/mentor other students. Despite the extra service demands placed on the underrepresented faculty members, the extra services were not rewarded in gaining tenure or prestigious positions (Viernes Turner, 1999).

In reviewing the literature on mentoring, many approaches and definitions were discussed. Students who had a mentor relationship in higher education had more meaningful matriculation experiences than those students who lacked a mentor (Harris, 2002). Several studies (e.g., Blackwell, 1981; Greer-Williams, 2001; Kochan, 2002; Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002), examined cross-cultural relationships and discovered race and social background differences among the pair can be the source of problems. Similarly, several researchers found there were not sufficient numbers of minority faculty members to be role models (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Viernes Turner, 1999).
Financial Support and Funding Mechanisms

The CGS (2004) report examined the variable of sufficient financial support in Ph.D. program completion and found it to be an essential factor for all students. The study identified a wide variance in the amount received, type of financial support, funding source, and time received for doctoral students (CGS, 2004). Golde and Dore (2001) reported that many doctoral students said they had entered a Ph.D. program without having any ideal of the costs involved for completion of their program. Lovitts (2001) stated that the most common reason noncompleters gave for their attrition was not being able to meet their financial obligations. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) also examined factors of attrition and determined that adequate financial support is essential for the successful completion of a doctoral degree. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) suggested that students who were forced to rely primarily on their own resources had higher attrition rates and longer spans of time-to-degree than those who received adequate financial aid, fellowships and assistantships.

The Carnegie Foundation (2001) reported that the government made more investments in higher education 30 years ago than it does today, which meant more money for doctoral students. Also, the report mentioned that many of today’s students have accumulated considerable debt by the time they graduate. The NSF (2003) found that larger percentages of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral graduates reported debt of over $30,000, while more White students reported that they did not have any debt related to doctoral education. Second only to the quality of the educational preparation received in levels K-undergraduate, adequate financial assistance was determined to be an important
element for assuring an underrepresented students' entry, retention, and success in higher education (Pruitt, 1987). Melendez (1994) discovered a direct link between the decline in federal-aid awards to students and a decline in the enrollment numbers of underrepresented students into doctoral programs.

Melendez (1994) observed that much of the financial assistance for graduate education is rendered through fellowships, research, and teaching assistantships. This type of financial assistance is issued primarily on a merit system, dependent upon students' standardized examination scores or through faculty members who have secured research grants. African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students traditionally had not received a fair share of these funds because of borderline standardized tests scores (Melendez, 1994). Financial assistantships targeted for underrepresented students were often divided among international students, despite the proven financial need of domestic students of color (Melendez, 1994).

Students without sufficient financial support were found to be the most common non-completers from a program (Lovitts, 2001). In other studies, several researchers examined financial support and discovered that adequate financial assistance was essential in assuring successful graduation for students of color (Carnegie Foundation, 2001; Melendez, 1994; NSF, 2003; Pruitt, 1987). Lastly, through this research several institutional barriers emerged in the way financial aid is distributed among underrepresented students (Melendez, 2003; NSF, 2003; Pruitt, 1987).
The Program Environment

The CGS (2004) report indicated that there are informal elements within graduate departments that contribute to a supportive student climate. The informal elements were defined as opportunities to participate in department events, regular social gatherings, team sports, and a comfortable lounge with refreshments, professional publications, bulletin boards listing activities in the discipline, and visible recognition of student achievements (CGS, 2004, p. 16).

Martinez and Aguirre (2003), however, indicated a cultural chasm existed among mainstream faculty and underrepresented students over the meaning of academic social events. Thus, many students of color had misinterpreted the invitation, believing it to be just a boring academic function and not a way to increase learning. The faculty members, on the other hand, viewed the student as being uninterested or just lazy, and most often did not extend another invitation (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). Further their study uncovered that the real situation that was not realized by faculty or student was that most students of color were not experienced with the campus culture or with making crucial decisions about their education. Other studies concluded that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students were at high risk of leaving their program of study because they lacked the understanding of informal department dynamics (Anderson, 1998; Goodchild, Green, Katz & Kluever, 1997).

Diverse faculty members were viewed as an essential element for a supportive, pluralistic department environment (Viernes Turner, 1999). The status for faculty of color in higher education was reported as one of a continued pattern of underrepre-
sentation and racial/ethnic bias, however (Viernes Turner, 1999). When surveyed, regarding their perceptions of department environment, over 95% of the ethnic faculty reported isolation, lack of information about tenure and promotion, unsupportive work environments, language barriers, and lack of support from superiors (Viernes Turner, 1999). In another study on faculty of color, Brown (1994) found many instances of these professors being hired to teach specialty classes on race relations or ethnic-related studies. Brown (1994) concluded that the hiring trends for underrepresented faculty at predominantly White institutions were limited in the available positions and in the breadth of their training.

Curriculum, Processes, and Procedure

The standard doctoral education program required students to complete a series of “gateways” or stages along the road to degree completion (Lovitts, 2001). These stages include coursework completion, program approval, dissertation committee selection, preliminary and qualifying exams, and in some programs, satisfying a foreign language requirement. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) indicated the duration of a Ph.D. program can average from 3 to 7 years. They also identified principal stages common to most Ph.D. programs: (a) a period of formal course-work that lasts from two to three years; (b) a less well-defined period in which a general examination or qualifying exam must be passed, and other stipulated requirements completed; and (c) dissertation research and writing.

Although doctoral programs varied across universities and disciplines, almost all required the dissertation as the hallmark of good scholarship (Goodchild et al.,
Success in doctoral training has been linked to the student being prepared for the process of matriculation before entering a program of study (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). In a regional study, Colchado (2003) surveyed underrepresented graduate students on challenges they faced in their graduate program: “Most feel that their high school and undergraduate experiences did not prepare them for the kind of expectations there are for graduate students such as the emphasis on critical thinking . . . and the general knowledge students are expected to have as the foundation for the content of courses” (p. 142). The CGS (2004) explored factors in completion and discovered higher completion rates occurred in programs where elements of the qualifying exam process linked to the creation of a dissertation prospectus.

Lovitts (2001) said that a students’ ability to locate or not locate an appropriate advisor was another difference among completers and noncompleters. A quality advisor was credited with being able to influence a student’s “understanding of the disciplines, the roles and responsibilities of academic professions, their socialization as a teacher and researcher, the selection of a dissertation topic, the quality of the dissertation, and subsequent job placement” (Lovitts, 2001, p. 131).

Golde and Dore (2001) surveyed third-year and above Ph.D. students from 27 universities and indicated that many students at every stage did not clearly understand what doctoral study entailed, how to work the process, or how to navigate it effectively (p.30). Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) concluded that even with the best of intentions, the dissertation advising process could go astray because it was so deeply rooted in the human dimensions of the professor and student. In other words, a negative encounter in the dynamics of the relationship often proves to be detrimental.
to the student, causing him or her to drift without guidance for a precious period of
time (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992).

Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) reported that many underrepresented doctoral
students had a difficult time locating a proper advisor. The problems were rooted in
the differences over research interests and issues of racism. Blackwell (1987) and
Seymour and Hewitt (1997) examined these relationships and found that often main-
stream professors holding stereotypical attitudes based on inherent beliefs about
underrepresented groups and transfer those feelings to students which interfere in
effective advisor/advisee relationships. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) concluded that
unless a department had an effective program for underrepresented doctoral students
to find appropriate advisors the students would have waste precious time over
locating proper advisors.

There were several areas within this section that emerged as barriers to doc­
toral program success. Students that had not been properly prepared academically
before entering a program of study found more challenges than those students who
entered understanding the process (Colchado, 2003; Goodchild et al., 1997; Lovitts,
2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). A few studies examined this topic and found a
quality advisor was an essential element for success in every phase of a program
(Goodchild et al., 1997; Lovitts, 2001). However, some studies (i.e. Blackwell, 1987;
Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992) discovered barriers in the formation of effective advisor/
student relationships, especially among cross-racial pairs.
Research Modes of Individual Fields

Students who are supported by research assistantships and engaged with faculty members in their intended vocation tend to have higher completion rates and lower time to degree than students who have little or no engagement with faculty members in their intended vocation (CGS, 2004). Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) indicated the distinction in completion rates to be anchored in the characteristic mode of research of certain fields and the dissertation stage. For example, doctoral students in the sciences ordinarily perform their research in a collaborative, laboratory-based style, while students in the humanistic and social-science fields tend to research and write their dissertations in isolation.

Austin (2002) discovered that only a few doctoral graduates have sufficient exposure to the reality of a new faculty member's world. Most Ph.D. students matriculate and work in large research universities that have radically different environments than the institutions where most jobs are available, namely, small public and private colleges, public comprehensive universities, and community colleges (Adams, 2002).

The researchers in this section explored the various fields of study in a doctoral program and their means of preparing doctoral students for future academic careers. Several barriers emerged in orientating students into potential higher education roles. For example, variance was found in the ways students conducted and wrote their dissertation research (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). Others discovered that few doctoral students have an orientation to the different higher education institutions or the various types of jobs available (Adams, 2002; Austin, 2002).
The final section of this literature review covers the human dynamics within the organizational structure of universities. Owens (2001) concluded that the behaviors of people in an organization are forged from the interaction between their inner motivational needs and their basic characteristics (i.e., temperaments, intelligences, beliefs, perceptions). He went on to say that the organizational environment consists of the socially constructed reality of the members within.

**Human Dynamics in Higher Education**

*Department Cultures*

This section summarizes a body of research literature that explored the human dimensions of higher education and how within this complex organization, learned patterns of behavior are shaped. For example, Lovitts (2001) discovered that when doctoral students, both underrepresented and Whites, enter graduate school they are subjected to socialization processes that are intense and influential. The level of success in the new environment is dependent upon the student’s abilities to recognize a new culture and understand how to navigate through it (Lovitts, 2001).

Culture was defined as the core set of values, belief systems, norms, and the ways of thinking that were characteristic of the people in the organization (Owens, 2001). Adler, Rosenfield, Towne and Proctor II (1998) examined the confines of an organization and defined the social tone within or climate as the way people felt about each other as they interacted. Owens (2001) determined that the dimensions of the
climate were strongly influenced by the social environment, which was set and regulated by the administrators in higher education through the enforcement of policies.

*The Dominant Groups’ Culture*

Lovitts (2001) stated that the White male, upper, middle-class value was the dominant culture within most graduate departments. Dumais (2002) summarized that the value system of the dominant class was reinforced and practiced in most educational settings. Therefore, students deficient in the understanding of this value system will have lower expectations of their potential for success in that environment. Furthermore, the White ethnic group reinforced their dominance in contemporary society by structuring all other ethnicities to follow their examples in schools, media, and the American society (Nieto, 2004).

McIntosh (1988) defined the attitude, assumption, and belief many people of the White culture assumed because of their preferred status. In the following statement she described the patterns of behaviors that were passed on to her as a White person:

...whether through the curriculum or in the media, the economic system or the general look of people in the streets, I received daily signals and indication that my people counted and that other either didn’t exist or must be trying to be like people of my race... Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color. (p. 182)
Negative Beliefs and Behaviors

Several studies examined behaviors within organizations when group members have different levels of power, such as that found in a faculty/student relationship. Adler et al. (1998) examined racism and other forms of discriminate behavior and assessed that it was based in the perceptions of one ethnic group, class, gender, or language that they were superior to all others. Nieto (2004) indicated that in public education discrimination practices result in negative behaviors and the denial of certain rights.

Luz Reyes and Halcon (1996) examined racism in higher education and found two common practices that create a picture of an unwelcoming environment for people of color: (a) overt, open and upfront such as an interview for a faculty position and (b) covert, more subtle and difficult to discern by people who have not experienced it. Examples of covert racism were defined as being the token hire, being hired for only minority-related positions, or having their research devalued for taking on minority centered topics (Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1996).

The researchers identified several patterns of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors common to people (i.e., faculty, administrators, and students) who dwell within higher education (Adler et al., 1998; McIntosh, 1988; Owens, 2001). Other studies (Dumais, 2002; Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1996; Nieto, 2004), examined the behaviors of the dominant group and how these translate into cultural barriers for underrepresented groups. The literature in the next section examined another cultural idiom—learning styles and factors that impact learning.
The Learned Cultural Identity

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I... depends in large part on who the world around me says I am... what message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks, the media... how am I represented in the cultural images around me. (Daniel Tatum, 1997, p. 18)

The literature found that identity is formed through a complex means of integration of socio-economic status, family values, school values, peer pressures, community, and the media (Daniel Tatum, 1997; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Nieto (2004) suggested that in many instances there is a lack of congruence between home and the school culture, which directly affected students’ identity and educational outcomes. Daniel Tatum (1997) explored this subject and found that many times ethnic youth, in the development of their identities, are torn between the contrasts of their family and school culture. Consequently, they will gravitate toward the dominant culture’s values and ways (because it is reinforced on many fronts) and de-emphasize their characteristics unless there is strong parental involvement (Daniel Tatum, 1997).

Educational experts infer that habitus and cultural capital are major indicators of success in education at the K through doctorate level (Dumais, 2002; Mickelson, 2003). Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Dumais (2002) defined habitus as a person’s view of the world and his or her perception of their place in that world. Further, cultural capital is the accumulation of the dominant class’ socio-cultural values (Dumais, 2002). Based on this assumption, students without the ability to
invest in the accumulation of cultural capital will have lower expectations of their potential in the world (Dumais, 2003; Mickelson, 2003).

Smith and Moore (2002) indicated that African Americans currently attending predominately-White institutions (PWIs) varied significantly in the levels and types of prior social experiences they have had with the White group. Seymour and Hewitt (1997) indicated that African American students from the inner city held different attitudes and expectations for success than African American students from upwardly-mobile professional families. Santos and Rigual (1994) determined that within the Hispanic/Latino population the subgroup, socialization characteristics influenced cultural identity and their exposure to dominant values. For example, of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population; 64% were Mexican-American, 10.6% were Puerto Rican, 4.7% were Cuban, 14% were of Central and South American descent, and 7% were other Hispanic origin (U.S. Census, 1992). Thus, these students’ levels of pre-exposure to dominant group members were found to influence their expectations and development within the university culture in a positive or negative way. The authors concluded that when underrepresented students developed negative expectations, they were more likely to become disillusioned, dissatisfied, and harbor negative perceptions about Whites.

Austin (2002) reported that all students, underrepresented and dominant, enter a doctoral program with cultural background experiences and personal factors that can help or hinder their ability to complete in the new environment. The author identified personal factors as locus of control (or the extent to which a person perceived that he or she had the power to direct his or her life), a student’s sense of self-
efficacy, and the student’s ability to make effective connections with people from other cultures (Austin, 2002).

Cultural Identity Traits

Greer-Williams (2001) defined ethnic characteristics of underrepresented group members in predominantly White institutions that hindered their ability to be promoted. However, the characteristics were defined as essential elements in persistence to upward-mobility. The results emerged as cultural identity traits: African American females had to watch being too strong or assertive because it was viewed as aggressive behavior. Their abilities to balance many activities and nurture others often invited extra workloads. African American males mentioned that their integrity, honesty, survival skills, physical strength, and resolve to survive often made them a threat to White males. Thus, when involved in a dispute with dominant group members African American males had to be mindful of not being too confrontational. However, Latino males were acculturated to be humble and consider the needs of their family and others before their own needs were often viewed as unsociable. Success within their families emerged as more important than socializing with peers. Latino females also found that their acculturation to humility emphasized more in them then Latino males was contrary to the way female leaders acted within a corporate setting. They had to resist the urge to wave their leadership decisions to males who were in lower positions.

The literature on American Indians reported that of all the ethnic groups, these students are the smallest population and the least surveyed in higher education.
(Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Tierney, 1996). There was a salient cultural contrast among American Indians raised on reservations and those from urban backgrounds (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). American Indian students who grew up on reservations were more tied in generational poverty were more likely to know the role of tribal languages and traditional values (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). American Indians who were socialized in White mainstream society were found to lack a strong sense of ethnic identity because they did not identify with other American Indians. Tierney (1996) found that both urban and reservation American Indian students in the “chilly” higher education environment suffered from separation and adjustment issues.

American Indian students from the reservation were more prone to problems over being in an environment that demanded that they compromise their cultural identity to fit in the mainstream culture (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). These students were acculturated to view education in a holistic manner. Their tribal traditions, value of nature, and native language are ingrained as youths and viewed as wisdoms. These do not fit within the mainstream educational system and this can cause the student to incur feelings of alienation and disconnectedness (Tierney, 1996).

Summary

Current trends in American society and higher education reveal barriers for African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students. The themes discussed in the literature found that the American public education system has not fully complied with the desegregation mandate of the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, resulting is an era of confusion regarding diversity in higher education (Blackwell,
1981; Byrd-Chichester, 2000; Springer, 2004; Wilson, 2003). There are socio-economic realities that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian groups encounter in this country that render them the most marginalized of all ethnicities (Blandin, 1994; Justiz, 1994; Miller, 2004; NCES, 2003; Polakow, 1998).

The studies also revealed how the socio-economic realities interfered with their sociological and educational preparation. Thus, their progress in the elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions was inferior to White students and produced negative consequences at each stage (CGS, 2004; Lovitts, 2001; Smith, 1994).

Underrepresented students who persisted and enrolled in doctoral education programs encountered a cultural environment that was more challenging than they faced at any other level (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Institutional policies and procedures, "chilly" departmental climate, the dissertation process, financial problems emerged as the barriers to assimilation within a predominantly white institution (Viernes Turner, 1999). Lastly, the African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students perceived greater feelings of racial discrimination, lack of social integration, and more interfering problems than White students (Pruitt, 1987). Ultimately, these students were found to balance many complex issues that were not apparent in the doctoral enrollment application. Unless higher education administrators realize the vulnerability of these ethnic-group members and move to make changes, their attrition level will continue to be higher than White students.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Underrepresented doctoral students, specifically African American, Hispanic/Latino and American-Indian, have a significantly higher attrition rate than majority doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001). Research to date on this topic has focused on causes and barriers that can be attributed to mainstream groups, not on particular cultural barriers that may adversely affect doctoral persistence among underrepresented groups (CGS, 2004; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001). While the barriers for mainstream and underrepresented groups may be similar, there may also be unique factors that affect persistence among underrepresented groups which have not been researched.

The higher education community and society are losing record numbers of potential underrepresented leaders because of a systemic failure to develop a bridge between students’ complex sociological backgrounds and the organizational forces they encounter (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). The methodology chosen to study this phenomenon, entitled phenomenology, is not steeped within the traditional paradigm of a single lens into human dimensions. It is a multi-dimensional, inductive approach that has proven to be the most effective in giving voice to groups which are rendered silent from traditional research (Creswell, 2003; Orbe, 2000).
Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a methodological science that studies the “conscious experience” of a person and the world that they inhabit and function in (Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Husserl (1970) defined the phenomenologist as being concerned with the general discussions of people who are able to speak of a subconscious, objective knowledge. The goal of phenomenology is to translate into pure expression the intuitive knowledge of a subject related to a particular situation (Ray, 1994; Zichi Cohen & Ornery, 1994). van Manen (1990) refined the definition into the method a researcher uses to explore the “experiences of people” in their “lived world” and able to deduce meanings from their experiences (p. 11). Phenomenology as a methodology, originally developed in Germany in the early twentieth century was later adopted by a number of American scholars for the study of intercultural relationships (Herndon, 1993; Orbe, 2000).

An essential component of phenomenology is that the study starts and ends with the researchers’ reflection on their understanding, judgments, biases, and connection to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). This process is necessary for the researcher to be open and free of any bias or judgments while studying the lived experience of the subjects (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Gall et al., 2003). The ultimate aim of phenomenology is to transform the lived experiences of the subjects into textual expressions so that the reader can imagine the true nature of their phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).
Researcher’s Understanding of the Phenomenon

Based on the assumptions of phenomenology, it is essential for the researcher to begin the study by reflecting on prior experiences, assumptions and biases with the phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002; Creswell, 2003). To this end, I as the researcher within this study begin my reflection with my ancestry; my perceptions of the higher education system were formed through my early educational development, sociological and economic realities of my family, and being a person of blended heritage, African American and American Indian.

The community I grew up in and graduated high school from was a predominantly White, upper middle-class value, Midwestern town. My family was one of the five Black families “accepted” to live there. The community, schools, and my family operated on a color-blind policy. I was insulated by these forces from the tensions “outsiders” felt when they came within our quaint environment. I knew that I was different from my White friends and classmates but never attributed it to race. One day however, my eyes were opened and made aware that my skin color and hair texture were not preferred over that of White people. Since that time, my eyes have not closed to the stinging treatment rendered to certain persons/groups because their race/ethnicity/gender or whatever is different than the dominant group.

I was socialized in this community and within an idealistic, creative, supportive family that struggled consistently with poverty to make a sustainable living. I was the first girl of two, and the second oldest child in a line of seven to be born to working-class parents. Before I was born, my father, a seventh grade dropout, self-educated person and musician, played professional jazz with Count Basie. My
mother graduated from high school (at the top of her class) and was a writer, avid reader, and busy homemaker. Neither parent knew about or tried to attend college. Of my siblings, aunts, uncles, close cousins, children and extended family members, I am the only person who has matriculated to the level of a doctoral candidate. I believe these experiences helped me understand the role that socioeconomic realities play in the hindrance to individuals who are first-generation college attendees and want the American dream of a better life.

My entrance into post-secondary education was not the same as many students. I am considered a non-traditional student. I balanced school with the roles of a wife, motherhood, multiple jobs, community connections, and family’s low expectation of education post-high school for women. I took a few classes at different community colleges to improve my chances of a good job. These classes turned into different educational quests. Ultimately, I graduated with my Associates degree and transferred to a four-year institution without any counseling or mentoring. I finished my baccalaureate degree as a part-time student. Thereafter, I was accepted into law school. However, after a year I became disillusioned with the profession and financial struggle and withdrew.

Subsequently, I encountered a person who became my first academic mentor. He helped me understand the advantages of having an advanced degree. Through further guidance, I was accepted as a full-time Master’s student with a teaching assistantship. I excelled at this level and was especially fond of all the departmental mentorship and professional guidance. Based on the wonderful experiences and implied assumptions that the doctorate level would create more of the same type of
experiences, I opted to undertake a doctoral degree. I conducted what I thought was a lot of research on schools and departments before I committed to one but found that my knowledge was not sufficient for understanding the rigors of a doctoral program.

I am considered a highly-educated, African American and American Indian, blended woman and am proud of everything I have accomplished. With the attainment of each academic degree and exposure to the higher educational environment, I've noticed that I have lost certain aspects of my cultural heritage. I have compromised aspects of my race and gender to succeed in a White, male-dominated environment. In other words, my culture lies somewhere between African American, American Indian, and White. The chasm between my heritage and educated self deepens with each step towards my attainment of the Ph.D. degree.

Due to all of my prior experiences with the dominant group and the educational system, I may bring certain biases and judgments to this research. Although every effort will be made to ensure objectivity, these biases may shape the way I see, view and understand the data I collect as well as the way I interpret experiences. I further believe, however, that this learned understanding will help me to be sensitive to the many challenges, complexities of life, decisions and issues other underrepresented students bring to post-secondary institutions.
Three-Step Process

Data Analysis

According to prior researchers (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; van Manen, 1990), phenomenological inquiry involves a three-step process of discovery that entails description, reduction and interpretation. Each step is interdependent, and spirals and intertwines continuously with the other steps (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). This synergistic process is explained further as each step being part of a whole; in the process of undertaking this procedure the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts (Creswell, 2003). Ultimately the goal of the 3-step process is to gain a more direct contact with the lived experiences of a people so that the researcher can reflect on those experiences and gain insight into the essence of their experiences (Gall et al., 2003). Or in the case of this dissertation, to explicate the essence of what it means for an underrepresented doctoral student to encounter cultural and institutional barriers.

Creswell (2003) found that this process reduces the entire interview situation to auditory data and, in turn, the transcription reduces speech down to more visual data. The data containing the conscious experiences of subjects allows the researcher to step into their construct of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 2003). This helps the researcher isolate segments of the lived experiences and encapsulates them in a bracket, which further isolates the expression from external ideals (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).
The Reduction Process

The second step of the phenomenological process is called the reduction (van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2003) described this step as the initial process of refining, expanding, developing, and discarding the non-relevant from the relevant themes. van Manen (1990) calls this “a process of insightful invention, discovery and disclosure” that is not a conventional process but more an act of “seeing meaning” in the phenomenon (p. 79).

The reduction is a synergist process consisting of two major cycles that concur on top of each other (Creswell, 2003). In turn, within each cycle a series of interchanges occurs between the researcher and subjects, and the researcher and the transcripts (van Manen, 1990). Thus, this rubbing together process results in meaningful, essential descriptions of the lived reality of the subjects.

The first cycle is called imaginative free variation, a process that results in an abundance of possible themes regarding the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Both phases of the reduction process consist of the researcher: (a) reading through each transcript without making any notations; (b) reading through the transcripts a second time, highlighting words, phrases, and recollections that seem insightful about the experiences of the subjects; (c) bracketing paradigmatic themes; and (d) continuing the process until the theme is reduced into a snapshot of the lived experience (Gall et al., 2003).

Within this process the researcher takes a bracketed phrase and reflects on whether the lived experience would change if the bracketed phrase were removed from the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 1990). This segment will require
several rounds of reflection until the bracketed phrase and its relation to the phenomenon becomes clear.

After the original themes have been identified, the researcher then uses these themes as objects for reflection in the follow-up interviews with the subjects (Ray, 1994). This becomes an opportunity for the subjects to aid the researcher in deducing meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The follow-up sessions among the researcher and participants are occurrences where both parties weigh the appropriateness of each theme and further reduce the number of themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Ultimately, these analyses take the flat words from the page and transform them into a three dimensional portrayal of the phenomenon (Greer-Williams, 2001).

*The Hyper-Reflection Cycle*

Merleau-Ponty (1968) described the last cycle as the hyper-reflection. In this phase the researcher reflects upon their experiences and preconceived biases and what they contribute to the phenomenon (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). This phase begins by the researcher reviewing the essential themes and conceptualizing on how these relate to one another (Creswell, 2003). Through a continual process of thematizing, bracketing, and interpreting, one theme will emerge that serves as a means of the interconnectivity of several essential themes (Creswell, 1998). Lastly, this reflective process will further strip away the data until one or two, specific, and revealing phrases will serve as indicators of certain meanings which were not immediately apparent in the earlier phrases (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In summary, the objective of this three step
process was used to articulate the essential meaning of being an African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral student.

The Collection of Data

The Underrepresented Student Participants

The most important criteria in selecting individuals to study is to find subjects who have experienced the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 1998). In this study, 15 doctoral students of color were selected to share their experiences in post secondary institutions. African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian, men and women, Ph.D. students in various phases of matriculation were selected from three university settings. Initially, participants were chosen from friends, professional contacts, and email inquiries. As knowledge of the subject matter circulated among contacts, more people were referred and agreed to be part of this study. Ultimately, the breakdown of respondents equaled: African American females (7); African American males (4); Hispanic/Latino males (1); Hispanic/Latino females (2); and an American Indian (1).

The participants, as a group, shared the classification of underrepresented doctoral student and all but one were the first members of their immediate families to matriculate a doctoral degree. They differ however, in their paths to higher education, matriculation styles and family responsibility. Their programs of study were sociology, psychology, education, administration, counseling psychology, and measurement and evaluation. The educational path for some of the participants started at
inner-city public schools and then a transition into community colleges before graduation school. A few entered the education pipeline in foreign countries and transferred into American colleges and universities. One participant went to a private, college preparatory high school and prestigious undergraduate institution. In addition, a few participants' early education started in rural community settings and one person went straight into a four year university, and the other entered community college.

Matriculation styles, such as attending school on a full- or part-time basis, was another way in which participants were distinguished from each other. Approximately half attended their graduate levels of education as full-time students, while the remaining group worked full-time and matriculated as part-time student. In the area of family responsibility, some of the participants are single and raising children, and a few have the added responsibility of caring for a chronically ill family member.

Research Sites

The data was collected at three university settings: a predominantly White institution [PWI], a historically Black college/university [HBCU], and a racially mixed campus [RMC]. I was a student at each site during my doctoral program, which is why I was granted access to participants at each university through several leadership positions I held at each university. I became aware of distinct differences among the schools and the styles in which students matriculate within their doctoral programs.

The organizational structure at the PWI was loosely structured. Their Graduate College established policies for the doctoral program and the departments independently interpreted them for their programs of study. There was no university
wide orientation program for entering doctoral students; however, the Graduate College offered a two-day mandatory orientation workshop for students that were teaching assistants, research assistants, and associates. The racial makeup of the students, faculty, and support staff was approximately 90% White, with the majority of department heads being male. Upon admittance into their program of study all doctoral students were assigned an academic advisor from their department. Students go through their coursework, qualifying exams, selecting a dissertation committee and topic with minimal support programming from the Graduate College and their departments. The composition of the dissertation committee followed the traditional model of a chairperson, one or two tenured faculty members from the student’s department and a required outside team member. Quantitative research was the predominant model among departments; however, qualitative dissertations were also acceptable. Through my observations I noticed how difficult it was to track students once they were admitted into a program of study. This proved to be problematic in getting students to participate in retention activities and workshops.

Of all the research sites, the organization structure of the Graduate College at the HBCU was based on the most traditional structure. This Graduate College was the central force in establishing doctoral policies and maintained a strong control of enforcement through the departments. The racial makeup of students was approximately 70% people of African descent, and 30% represented Hispanic/Latino, White and Asian. Another consideration besides race was ethnic culture because these students originated from 91 countries. The racial composition of the faculty was
about 50% African descent and the remainder being Hispanic/Latino, White, Asian, and American Indian, with 50% of the leadership position being held by females.

All entering and returning first year doctoral students were required to attend a two week mandatory orientation workshop conducted by the Graduate College before classes started. Students also were required to attend retention workshops, social events, and participate in the annual peer reviewed graduate symposium. Most of the students attended on a full-time basis and were supported through grants, scholarships and fellowships. This school also had a Preparing Future Faculty [PFF] program which had established partnerships with other colleges and universities throughout the world. This allowed the doctoral students the opportunity to take part in sponsored travel events, conduct research, and develop alliances with other schools.

Quantitative research was the prevailing model, however many students engaged in feminist, humanistic, and international studies. The composition of the dissertation committee was similar to that of the PWI. My observation was that the university invested a lot of time and effort into the development of these students, and it reflected in their more positive attitudes and confidence.

The RMC was the largest and most progressive of the three organizations in reference to student research modes. As with the PWI, this school had a graduate department that established overall policy and each department independently interpreted these policies for use in their doctoral programs. The racial makeup of the campus was more diverse than the PWI and HBCU. Also this school had many female department heads and a less ordered structure than the HBCU. All doctoral students were required to take an introductory research methods course sometime
during their first year. In this class the students had to select research pedagogy for a concentrate and whatever methodology was chosen, the student took a series of those classes. For example, if the student selected correlation theory than they would have two or three classes in correlation theory.

Moreover, at the end of coursework the students had to take an advanced research methods course. The dissertation process was also conducted differently than the other two institutions. First of all, each department had a faculty member as a representative for all student research projects with the Human Subjects Review Board. Another element to the dissertation phase that was unique at this school was that each student entering the dissertation phase was assigned a group of 3 peers during the duration of the dissertation. These peer groups met regularly to discuss various aspects of the project, and had the clearance of the Human Subjects Review Board to review the sensitive materials of the research. The composition of the dissertation committee was the same as the other two schools. Qualitative, quantitative, and feminist construct theories were equally practiced methods at this institution. I noticed that these students had the most sense of comrade among each other than at the other schools, and I believe it had to do with the research projects and team work in their classes.

*Focus Group Sessions*

This study collected the lived experiences of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. Following the standard exploratory phenomenology methods, the researcher used two styles to gather the richest
descriptions from participants, focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews (Zichi Cohen & Omery, 1994). Focus groups were used to work up the complexities associated with underrepresented groups in doctoral education (Herndon, 1993).

The researcher conducted four initial focus groups at each university setting. The goal was to establish a working relationship with the participants and to test the original Interview Guide (see Appendix C). At the beginning of each session, the researcher gave each participant a Consent Document (see Appendix B) to sign outlining the possible risks associated with being part of the study. This step was required to comply with Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix A), at two of the three settings because of the “at-risk” status of students’ race/ethnicity and limited numbers. For this dissertation the researcher assessed that the assured confidentiality of participants were the leading concern, both in the focus groups and the subsequent research document. Consequently, participants received assurance that their names, any identifiers, or schools would not be revealed under any circumstance.

Interactions with participants took place on three, research intensive, doctoral granting institutions. The schools were selected because each served different concentrations of race/ethnic ratio among faculty/administrators and students: Predominantly White Institution (PWI); Historically Black College and University (HBCU); Racially Mixed Campus (RMC). Another consideration for the campus setting was the researcher’s attendance at each university. These experiences increased the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon from the subjects’ standpoint. The researcher contacted each school and had to submit to a Human Subjects Institutional Review for
two of the universities (see Appendices A1 and A2). The third university just required collaboration with a faculty member.

Four initial focus groups were held in conference rooms at each university setting and lasted approximately an hour. An Interview Guide of general questions was developed to provoke a group discussion (see Appendix C). These sessions were audio-taped and the audio cassette from each session was subsequently transcribed. Finding that the original questions did not explore deep enough to flush out the breath of the phenomenon, another Interview Guide (see Appendix D) was developed for subsequent focus groups and face-to-face interviews. Ultimately, the audio cassettes from these 7 sessions were transcribed and yielded 150 pages of experiences expressed by underrepresented doctoral students.

Reflections on Understanding Participants’ Lived Experiences

For purposes of this discussion, I the researcher will explain the process of becoming one with the participants to bring the reader into this synergistic process. I found that the reflection process started with the first focus group session. Although, I spent a small amount of time in these sessions speaking and interviewing participants, I learned much about their life experiences in such a short period of time.

I walked away from each session with memories of the participants, notes and the audio cassette of their expressions. The labor intensive process of transcribing the audio cassette proved very effective in burning their words in my soul. For example, it took approximately four months to transcribe all of the audio cassettes and that was working at a constant rate. I found it a very tedious task to sit at the computer, hitting
the play tab for a few words and then the rewind tab—over and over again until my back grew weak or my eyes glossed over. In between the transcribing sessions, I also conducted other interview sessions.

I quickly realized that this long, tedious process of word after word became the synergy to understanding life from these participants’ standpoints. When I slept I would hear their voices in my mind. When I interacted with people such as faculty members, students, or the dominant group I had to contend with their voices. When it came time to start establishing themes from the transcripts their voices became my witness in establishing the categories. In a sense, the participants and I became one with the phenomenon and together we set about to narrow down the data to an expression of their experiences in higher education.

At this point, the synergistic process of reduction and imaginative free variation were conducted on the data and resulted in the first set of themes. See Chapter IV for further discussion. Through this process, the researcher gained a deeper insight and understanding of the participants’ lived experiences in post-secondary institutions. This process led to the refinement of the original themes and defined the experiences of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students.

Summary

The results of the original themes will be outlined in Chapter IV. As stated, another review of the general themes revealed several themes that were interconnected, redundant, or incidental. Ultimately, this continual process reduced the overwhelming
number of themes into phrases that described the lived experiences of underrepresented doctoral students.

The last stage of phenomenology is the interpretation process. This involves discovering meanings of the phenomenon that were not immediately apparent in the description or reduction stage. Chapter V reveals the process and the major themes, which reflect the essence of the meanings associated with being an African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and American-Indian doctoral student.

In conclusion, Bogdan & Biklen (1998) said that the goal of the qualitative researcher is to better understand human behavior and experiences. Additionally, they seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are. As the researcher, I can say this study was not conducted to question or judge the experiences of these individuals against others. This was conducted more as a method to explain the complexities these students endure that hinder their ability to complete their Ph.D. programs.
CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Thematizing

The second step in the phenomenological process and the goal of this chapter is to reduce the collected data into a description of the experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The data of 15 doctoral students—African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian, males and females—were collected by using audio-taped focus groups and face-to-face interviews. Thereafter, the researcher revisited participants in one-on-one meetings with specific questions relating to the phenomenon that arose from the focus group discussions. This interaction process took several repeat sessions until the deeper meaning of their experiences in post-secondary institutions surfaced. The information from these sessions was transcribed and resulted in 150 pages of transcripts.

The reduction process entails two cycles to reduce the data into meaningful, essential descriptions of the lived reality of the participants (Creswell, 2003). The entire reduction process is described in its entirety in Chapter III; however a brief review follows to help clarify the thematizing process. The researcher reviews each transcript without making any markings. Subsequent steps involve reading through each transcript again and highlighting words, phrases, and recollections of interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The final step in this cycle entails bracketing initial themes...
and continuing the process on other transcripts until the process is reduced into a statement of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The reduction process is analogous to peeling an orange. If the potential eater of an orange bites into the fruit in its natural form it would taste bitter. It is not until the outer and inner rind is peeled away and the seeds extracted does the eater sense the delectable, sweet juice of an orange.

Similarly, in this dissertation, layers and layers of data will have to be removed to find the meaning of underrepresented doctoral students in post-secondary institutions.

Through this process, several common threads emerged through the initial themes that helped to bring understanding of the participants’ experiences in their doctoral programs. What follows is a presentation of the initial themes and sub-themes which were revealed during the first cycle. For purposes of clarity, participants’ remarks were identified by an abbreviation of their ethnicity and gender, a letter followed by a number which appears after their remarks in parentheses. The abbreviations will be broken down in the following manner: AAF = African American female; AAM = African American male; HLF = Hispanic/Latino female; HLM = Hispanic/Latino male; AI = American Indian. An exception in the abbreviation of the American Indian participant was made to protect his or her identity because there was only one participant from that ethnicity. The transcripts were labeled with a letter from A-G, indicating the sequence order of the focus groups. For instance, a description followed by (AAF-A4) represents that the participant is an African American female, and the passage is from Transcript “A” on page 4.
Syntagmatic Thematizations

The following themes represent the assumptions, perceptions, experiences and disappointments with the post-secondary system. This listing is an extensive list of all the themes that emerged as essential to the lived experiences of these underrepresented doctoral students. Under each heading are representative comments and descriptions of perceptions and behaviors from participants to aid in clarifying their listing under a particular heading or sub-heading. The eleven resulting themes are: (1) attrition; (2) compounding life variables; (3) coping strategies; (4) early educational preparation; (5) faculty relationships; (6) first generational; (7) matriculation process; (8) mentor support; (9) program environment; (10) racial and ethnic issues; and (11) The White culture.

Under each heading is a brief commentary on the relevancy of the themes as well as respondent comments. This information was included with each theme to aid the reader in understanding the phenomenological process and the researchers’ logic. Creswell (2003) defines this step as an added layer of complex analysis.

Attrition

In the early focus groups participants were asked to comment on their understanding of attrition and if it was something they thought about. For instance, did they understand the definition, had they considered it as an option, or did they discuss attrition with anyone? This inquiry was relevant for the researcher to learn where
and under what circumstances in the educational process underrepresented students think about non-completion.

... after my second year I realized I had reached the break point cause nobody paid attention to me. I was new here, I knew I wanted to come, I knew all about the research, I knew all about the social part of it, but nobody talked to me. I was almost invisible and I knew I was going to give up if I did not get any help. (HLM-B7)

It’s a lack of social support. Assistantships are always available so it is not that factor. The problem is no mentor. I mean whatever you want to call it social support academic/academic/professor involvement, but no mentoring. (HLM-C13)

Of those people that want to get to the doctorate level I think the reason mentoring is very important and perhaps underlining the high attrition numbers are the messages, the connections and synergy that exists between what you need to make it and for the estimated 8 students out of every 10 students that leave it is not there. (HLF-C13)

I think anybody who pursues a doctorate and doesn’t finish there is a little bit of I wish I would have finished. Because ... they still are in love with the ideal of getting a doctorate, there is a dream component there. It’s a higher level goal and whenever you don’t fulfill your dream I think it is somewhat heartbreaking, it breaks a little bit of your spirit. And so I think a lot of people are walking around with broken spirits because they could not get that doctorate. (AAM-D13)

Connected to the resources that propel you through the program it is sort of like being at the airport and riding on the vertical escalators versus having to walk ... whereas minorities until they find that escala-tor if they every do, wander gauntly, running down to the terminal and they usually run out of gas—you know that is the attrition the wearing down or they eventually find the escalator and they make it. (AAM-G9)

Our institutions are training people to keep the same mess going ... we confer degrees every semester but why are the statistics regarding Blacks in education still getting worse? Blacks from K-12, the statistics are getting worse. If you say Black men are an endangered species who is building sanctuaries to preserve us like you do birds and this bee
from Africa that has become extinct. You are building sanctuaries for them, why aren’t you doing anything for the endangered species of Black males—because you are being trained you are not being educated. (AAM-G19)

Compounding Life Variables

This theme emerged as essential to defining the different life circumstances some underrepresented students experienced while matriculating. These experiences added challenges, deducted time and energy from school and made their educational quests different than those of students who did not have to face these circumstances. As the researcher I wanted to know if there were certain circumstances/issues that are so pervasive as to cause a student to leave their program before graduation.


And I sometimes find myself here as a single mother with a teenager going to high school and having to cover all of the different phases that I have to cover and being by myself, it is hard. (HLF-A5)

... you as a minority may not have the same resources as everyone else ... and other than dealing with the strengths of staying with the program, you are also going to have to deal with the lack of connections of attending to your own resources. (AAM-A5)

Well they say you must be self-sufficient; but when you have to spend five to seven years in the doctorate program and be self-sufficient for such a long [with emphasis] time you are asking somebody to do something that other students are not doing which is enduring isolation for seven years. (HLM-B4)

I did not go straight from my undergraduate, Masters and directly into the Ph.D., I had my daughter right in between ... I have been a part-time student throughout the Ph.D., and that makes a difference in terms of how much time you have to find a mentor or mentoring chances. (HLF-C1)
In between undergraduate and graduate I got married, had a child, moved out here and then finished up . . . so you go to work, you go to school, you go home, you don’t interact at least I didn’t. It was all about just trying to get done and get through. (AAF-E8)

My dad was an alcoholic, which is pretty prevalent in the Native American community. When I was growing up though, I never realized it until I was an adult because he was a “functioning alcoholic.” (AI-F2)

I ended up getting married; I got pregnant and sent to bed with all intentions of once my son was born returning . . . so I took the 20-year route to do my undergrad [laugh]. (AI-F4)

My coming from a welfare family, having a father but a father not in the home, I think coming up in a school that marginalized and minimized me being a Black child from kindergarten; being followed around in stores. Policemen pulling me over, telling me that my front light was out and when I got to my home all of my lights are working—which happened to me a few months ago. (AAM-G12)

. . . so I think it’s just the Black experience, the things we experience as African American men period are things that they [Whites] just don’t know and its like they don’t believe that it actually happened. (AAM-G12)

Coping Strategies

In the course of the focus groups and face-to-face interviews all of the participants seem to describe difficulties related to missing information about the post-secondary level. As this topic evolved into different dimensions there emerged descriptions related to coping within the environment. Some participants defined strategies they had to adopt to cope in an unfamiliar system. Some of the copying strategies are recommendations to fellow ethnic members. As the theme unfolded, several sub-headings seemed appropriate to further clarify respondents’ experiences:
(a) finding a friend to talk to, (b) having a determined attitude, and (c) what won’t go through the door.

Finding a Friend to Talk to

Many of the participants described their coping strategy as finding a friendly person to talk to about their lived experiences. These statements help define the coping strategy of how useful a friend is.

I always found one person that I could go and talk to and so for me that is very important. (HLF-A3)

And so somehow get some sort of peer based support . . . I joined [graduate student organization] and that kind of helped me to just listen to different people and what they are going through. (AAF-A4)

And then spiritual, physical and emotional support—it is basically learning how to have a balanced life in this type of environment otherwise you will be so stressed out. You know you can make it but you will make it with gray hair. (AAF-A4)

I don’t have family here; but family wise we actually gather strength from each other. (AAM-A5)

Having a Determined Attitude

These statements described a coping strategy and centered on attitudes and how attitudes are used as a coping strategy in the dominant world.

Being underrepresented I grew up in a predominantly White area so I know how to get around – how to figure things out. (AAF-A6)

I thought I am going to make it no matter what and I believed in what I was doing was right. (HLM-B7)
I think as underrepresented students we have God and other defense mechanisms as tools to become invisible when we need to. (HLF-C4)

I am a very self-sufficient individual so I tend not to rely on a lot of people. But then in the doctoral program you realized that you cannot take that type of approach you won’t survive. (AAM-D1)

I’m probably different than most because of my excitement level that I’ve maintained throughout my doctoral program . . . I’ve been very involved as soon as I got on campus, I became involved in a number of organizations, programs that connected with students, I’ve had a great support network. (AAM-D1)

I think everybody that enters a doctoral program needs to establish their academic identity quickly. What I mean is they need to find a project, they need to find an approach, they need to define a paradigm, and they need to find who they are academically and quickly. (AAM-D13)

This is going to sound really corny but at the point that I am at now I want to finish for the people who are coming behind me. I am pointed to as an example for other people. That is the powerful force that makes me want to finish more than anything else. I don’t want to let those that are following me down (AI-F17)

It was sort of like I got a precursor—the Lord gave me a little taste—He gave me a nice big plate of crow to eat and lowered my pride first of all and second he gave me an understanding of what it takes to get the job done. (AAM-G5)

What I see as important is those that are on my doctoral committee, relating to them positively and giving them what they ask for. If I don’t agree I know there is a way to disagree without being disagreeable. I know there is a diplomatic way to get what I need in order to get to the bottom line. Because it is like the commercial says, “They don’t say Haines until I say Haines—well they have to say you are Dr. so and so.” (AAM-G16)
What Won't Go Through the Door

These statements were related to coping but focused on explaining the aspects of culture that were not acceptable in the dominant world.

I believe African Americans experience two worlds due to the fact that they live in two different cultures and most people learn to blend the two. (AAM-G12)

You know that African American males have to make tough decisions; one is how much of the African American male culture can come to the door of the Ph.D., and has to be left at the door as you step into the Ph.D. door . . . the culture of White America is not as strong, but in the African American culture it is different. Family ties, camaraderie of your peers, loyalty to those that have taken care of you, wisdom or what you consider to be life lessons given from grandma don’t seep into the dominant status quo culture—and so you have got to find ways to reconcile those differences and philosophies. (AAM-G12)

Faculty Relationships

Participants had many faculty things to say about their professors in doctoral education. Respondents made a distinction between mentors and advisors. Some comments included statements about faculty and the program administrators, such as the descriptor from AAM-A5 where he talks about “the school”. Several sub-headings emerged as essential to organizing the different comments, such as: (a) assumptions about; (b) insensitive; (c) cultural sensitivity or the lack thereof; (d) at odds with; and (e) positive encounters.
Assumptions About

These statements had a central theme of faculty relationships and the participants seemed so sure that their beliefs regarding faculty's behaviors.

Sometimes we would like to be challenged but they think Oh we are going to make it easy for you. (HLM-B11)

While I would like to think there are White people out there that would support me . . . in most cases that is not the case. I've rarely seen a White male support a Black male the way this guy does. (AAM-D10)

I think more often than not faculty members do not grab a hold of Black males and say this is the identity I want you to have. Or they force one upon them that is completely inconsistent with who they are. (AAM-D13)

You have to be proactive in our department. Professors for the most part don't come out and beg. You have to go let them know what you are interested in. (AAF-E22)

It is not the professors it is not the chair of the department because I feel from them a pressure rather than a support. (AI-F16)

My experience so far has been there have not been wide open arms by White faculty. I see them you know they sit in their professor's offices and talk in the hallway. I believe that I am welcomed from the standpoint that I have worked in the office of my department and so I got a chance to smile at everybody and say 'Hi', and I think from that yes sure he is a nice guy but as far as being embraced, no—as far as being welcomed to collaborate, no. (AAM-G9)

Insensitive

As I read through the transcripts and came across these statements I felt the participants were describing incidents in which faculty members were either not
responsive or lacked the understanding of their needs. These issues as described are very important to these participants.

There was a point in my program where I almost quit the whole thing, because I was not having the same opinions that some of the faculty had in the department. So that was a pretty difficult time for me. (HLF-A2)

I have known faculty who have blown my name and called me by a totally different name for the last two years, it’s embarrassing you know. (AAM-A3)

But the school should be aware of the difficulties we encounter within the learning environment. (AAM-A5)

When I made mistakes, people were willing to tell me but nobody came to help me out. It was completely different from my masters. (HLM-B7)

I really did not feel that I had all of the tools to face what appeared at the beginning a very daunting task of writing. I had no problem with writing but I had heard so many times, 'look you have to have your work edited'. It was really a downer and I didn’t know if I was going to be able to do it. (HLF-C10)

I received so much campus resistance, you know, ‘You can’t do this in four years’. And you know that is disappointing because you don’t know what to think of it. Is it about the skill level that they perceived me to have or is it about they just thinking that most people take longer than four years to do it. (AAM-D2)

Well one of my colleagues who is an African American male went to this faculty member who was a majority member and said I am interested because his interest was also in schools and this particular faculty member did not contact him. So . . . did she just not feel comfortable with his skills or with his research ability or what was it that she never contacted him? And if it wasn’t a priority then just say that as opposed to waiting until the next year and using someone else. (AAF-E19)
Insignificant [laugh] I really truly feel that—that it's not seen as an issue from their point of view. (AI-F12)

Well I haven’t had someone say well I like this part that you have wrote now you can expand on this and do such and such or these are the next steps that you should be taking. (AI-F15)

Well there has not been anyone if I have asked them to give me information or help me has said no. I have gotten, 'Oh I haven’t got time’ or like when I was trying to form my committee there were many teachers, MANY who said, ‘I am just overwhelmed already I cannot take another student.’ (AAF-E15)

_Cultural Sensitivity or the Lack Thereof_

These statements are distinguished from “insensitive” because they are related to race or ethnicity. They still have the undercurrent the faculty member not understanding the diverse students’ need.

Some White professors delegate the responsibilities that should be on their shoulders by diffusing or delegating the student to other minority professors because they think they can do better—and sometimes they do but sometimes they don’t. (HLM-B9)

One of the things I heard from the beginning, from day one, the minute the professors saw my name ___, before seeing any of my work was, “Make sure that you have someone edit your work before you present it”. That comment in itself made me have a defensive mode from day one. (HLF-C3)

I think there is a lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of the professors. I also think it is very difficult to tell a professor who has reached that stage of what it is that he or she doesn’t seem to understand or know culturally. (HLF-C4)

I’ve realized that some White professors who helped me never had any multi-cultural experience. They did not have the social interaction but they spent time getting to know me and after spending time with me it
finally clicked and they got to see me the way I wanted them to see me and not based on the way they were told to see me. (HLM-B10)

I did hear clear and loudly all the way—you are going to get out as much as you put in. It is part of the competition. “Do you want to do this or not?” That’s the question I heard again and again. That means everything else should fall or make other arrangements. “But if you want to do this there is only one way you can do it.” (HLF-C9)

I have had several different professors say things to me that I shouldn’t just focus on my culture because if it is you studying your own culture that you have a slanted perception and I find that kind of disheartening. (AI-F14)

At Odds With

These descriptions were about aggressive encounters with faculty members that were more than an insensitive incident.

I always relied on what was written and that caused me some problems when the old faculty left and the new faculty came in and they had their own new way of doing things that was inconsistent with the previous faculty. (AAM-D3)

But before somebody [faculty] had told me no and I said, “You can’t stop me”, literally, “you can’t stop me, don’t tell me what to do.” (AAM-D4)

I think more for me I would have hit major road blocks with key faculty members . . . and we would have reached an impasse where I think I would have got knocked out eventually. (AAM-D8)

I think it is their perception of African Americans period. What White American sees in the media coming to school I think many of them think we are the same way. They think that well he must have sold drugs once upon a time. (AAM-G11)
Positive Encounters

This group of statements was about encounters with faculty members that were positive and described as very helpful to participants.

I had a professor who met with me on a regular basis who talked to me about my problems and helped me to solve problems, who helped me to find money, and I was able to be there for three years with lots of funding and doing well in all of my classes. (HLM-B2)

But we’ve hired two new faculty White females and so I was interested in their type of research and I told them I wanted to interact with them and work with them and they have been really good. (AAF-E13)

An African American female faculty came to me and said I have a couple of research projects would you be interested in working with me as a co-author. So it was her initiation, as seeing me in her class and looking at some of the papers that I had written. (AAF-E17)

First Generational

Being the first person in the family to matriculate a doctoral degree proved very essential to defining underrepresented students. For the participants this dilemma had several dimensions of impact and the sub-headings help define them. What unfolded during the sessions was the impact of their family members and friends who had no experiences with education: (a) student’s perspective, (b) family’s perspective, (c) family support, and (d) non-academic friends’ perspective.

Student’s Perspective

These expressions describe the students feeling, perceptions, and emotions over being a first-generation student.
Because coming from an underrepresented group I am a first generation student. So you come in and you don’t have a clue about anything. (AAM-A3)

Now of the minorities in the United States they seem to have their way of support but people who are new to the area, new to the entire process of doctoral education it is harder. (HLF-C2)

Time management what does that mean? It means adjusting to a way of life that I really did not want to. And that cliche sentence meant for me doing something everyday from 1-4pm or from 4-5pm no matter what else was going on in my life. It made me nuts and for me it was too much of a pressed acculturation for time managements’ sake. (HLF-C10)

I was very, very excited. I was excited because I am the first generation doctoral student in my immediate family, I am the first one to go to college and I was just excited. And I really didn’t give a lot of other things as much thought all I wanted to do was get in. (AAM-D1)

I relied so much upon handbooks, pamphlets and things like that—basic rules that often times are so disconnected with the actual process or the working in a university program. So often times what was right by the book was incorrect and so I made a lot of mistakes that way. (AAM-D3)

I felt like I was lacking because as a first generation student I did not understand the culture. Even now I feel like I should be getting more support. I should know more information and doing things that I am not doing. I do not know what those things are because there is nobody to tell me. (AAF-E7)

This is still a new experience because no one in my family has reached the doctorate level. And so being a first generation, I still don’t understand this system. And I feel like I am learning this process along with going through the process of being a doctoral student which in some sense makes it a little bit more challenging. And I feel some colleagues already know what this process is all about. (AAF-E10)

I think from the fact that many of us are the first generation of people going through and trying to get an education we don’t know other people who have done it, which is probably why we have to try to
band together to help each other. There is no one ahead of us to tell us, we don’t have parents that did it we don’t have people at the university telling us because they are already this institution. They don’t realize that there are people that don’t know what we have to do at each step of the way. (AI-F11)

Most minorities, first generation think if I just did what I did in undergrad, I will be fine. I get in and I get out. YOU don’t get in and then get out. That is too simplistic only 1% of Americans have PhDs which tells you that they ain’t easy to come by. (AAM-G5)

Being a first generation Ph.D. I didn’t understand any of the socializing. (AAM-G14)

Family’s Perspective

There were several participants who described the matriculation process as a first generational student from their family’s perspective. I think the lack of understanding is a major element of this group.

For me personally my difficulties are more of an issue of being a first generation, because my family just does not understand the process. For my family it is like work and make money; and that is what life is all about. It is not about this school or making a career out of school and they have no clue. (AAF-A6)

I have a good support network because my mother supports me with what I do. However, even though I am very lucky on that side she is unable to understand what work means in academia. (HLM-B16)

They don’t understand because there is nothing they can compare it to. My mother says you have so many books at home why do you keep buying books why don’t you buy another sweater? They do not understand what it means to write a paper or go to the library and spend six hours—"ARE YOU CRAZY", what is that for. (HLM-B17)

My dad did not graduate from high school my mom has an associate’s degree so they kept pushing me though they didn’t know what a Ph.D.
encompassed and work that it would require and things like that. (AAF-E13)

They have no clue what going to college entails and even now my mother who is living with me doesn’t understand that. She was just boggled that I was at school till 9:30 Tuesday night. I don’t know what it is going to be like to try to study with her there. You know she doesn’t know how much time and effort and how difficult it is to try to maintain your academics life and work. (AI-F13)

_Family Support_

These two statements focused more on the lack of family support, but it is interesting that support did not seem to describe financial support.

So I think it is mostly not having the support of my family—but I do think being a first generation is more difficult at this level when you don’t have anyone to show you the way. (AAF-A6)

Some of them want to support you because education is so important, being educated is going to make you more money and you hear that over and over. They support you but they don’t understand you. (HLM-B17)

_Non-academic Friends’ Perspective_

Even though there is just one statement about friends outside of academe, it helped me understand the forces that can influence a students’ decision, especially a first generational student.

Our friends who are Latino and are not in school will say things like, “You are going to ruin your spine carrying so much, why don’t you go to the gym instead of carrying this backpack with the laptop and all that stuff.” (HLM-B17)
Matriculation Process

The participants described many experiences related to matriculating their program of study. This theme emerged as essential to defining the lives of the participants and their difficulties, perceived barriers, and positive moments within post-secondary institutions. The data was divided into the following sub-headings: (a) without guidance, (b) without support, (c) the disappointment, (d) peer support, (e) the politics (f) socializing, (g) the cultural transformation of education, and (h) recommendations for change.

Without Guidance

I believe these statements are telling of the frustrations participants found in their doctoral programs. This sub-theme seems to be revealing a major element of the bigger picture of participants in higher education.

The answer is one of NOT BEING PREPARED, and it is true I mean since Latinos don’t have a tradition in college I cannot relate to anybody. (HLM-B2)

Now I read, I get around, I talk to people, and I try finding it. But... until recently I did not know the strengths and weaknesses of the program, what I should do or who I should talk to. I did not get while I was in school. (AAM-A5)

I did not have any idea, absolutely no idea of how the process works. I had no idea of how to talk with an advisor I had no idea of what I was suppose to do or what I could have expected from her. I had no idea there were so many of what I call internal politics in the department that I needed to be aware of, to navigate in an easy way and that is so important. (HLF-C2)
I didn’t have a faculty person that I could rely upon really. So my first year, I did almost everything on my own which I think had a lot to do with my personality. (AAM-D3)

I think I could have made some different choices even in my Masters’ degree if I thought about doing this ahead of time. I had no preparation on how to research, no preparation on statistics and so that has been a struggle. (AI-F13)

Without Support

These descriptions seemed more related to the feelings of isolation and loneliness within doctoral programs. This theme has an element of depth that will probably emerge as an essential element to understanding underrepresented students in the doctoral process.

What I found most difficult was to be away from my family that was the hardest. (HLF-A5)

And when you are not part of that team because you are not White—nobody is discriminating against you—but when you see in the group everybody is sitting at the table and leaving together is White and you are not one of them well it does affect your performance. (HLM-B3)

Most Latinos are not going to college most African Americans are not going to college so you are weird where ever you come from. Then you are even “weirder” because within these small groups you are not part . . . because they don’t look like you, they don’t talk like you and so you are isolated, physically, emotionally and that makes it hard. (HLM-B4)

So I was in a program essentially filled with strangers or people that I didn’t really establish a sort of rapport with. (AAM-D5)

And I think the only way I have survived to this point I am pretty much a loner. Anyway from a child I was the one that was always kind of pushed to the side and all of that so I learned to do most things
alone and I don’t look for a lot of support you know. So I am just kind of a self-motivated person. I know what I want and I go after it. I find those people that I feel that I can connect with and I just use them as my support. (AAM-G10)

*Peer Support*

This series of statements described the positive aspects of their doctoral programs such as peer support.

You keep trying to find out information from other students because it is only students who are telling me, “Maybe you should be looking for a committee right now.” (AAF-E7)

I have made networks with other graduate students and that has been very interesting because when you make these networks they share things with you so you don’t feel that you are on the outside looking in. (AAF-E13)

At this level I feel that the support of other students is essential. I think if I didn’t have friends that were in this program and other people that are going through these experiences, especially other students of color I wouldn’t have stuck with it. (AI-F10)

I think it is my colleagues that I am taking classes with, the other students I associate with we make some kind of system. We don’t know exactly everybody’s situation but there is enough commonality between us that we can just breathe and know there is a support system that is important. (AI-F16)

*The Disappointment*

These statements seemed to describe students’ disappointment with their doctoral programs.
I think gosh there has been a terrible disappointment. I came to the number one program in the nation . . . and I still can’t determine what makes this program number one for me as a minority student and when I ask other minorities in my section they say it doesn’t feel any different either. (HLM-B14)

But there was always, “Slow down and slow down”. But I don’t slow down. But again there was nothing they could do in terms of stopping me—particularly at the coursework level. (AAM-D2)

I don’t really feel that my ethnic background is really acknowledged here. I’ve checked with the office of diversity and received very little response. They always say that they are here for the African American students. I think it’s hard because I always think of myself as a minority person and we are probably the minutest group of minority people. (AI-D10)

I would not say volunteered, I’ve asked them and they said yes, that is not volunteering per se. I mean nobody has said, “hey come over here I want to help you”. It was me knocking on their door and saying, ‘I need help and will you help me’. (AAF-F13)

The Politics

This sub-heading contained descriptions describing barriers that can be attributed to politics or hidden aspects of the program. In the next round of reduction, this sub-heading might be able to be combined with the socializing.

Many minority people start with taking 2 or 3 classes or with non-degree seeking because they could not pass the barrier. (HLM-B13)

I really believe that professors know consciously or unconsciously they are keeping students at bay, from going on. I don’t think they ever not say to someone you can’t continue. But they do things which make it difficult for that person to continue . . . There are things that professors do that they know will either help a student progress or will keep them in this ambiguous sort of place where they don’t know what they are doing. (AAM-D8)
I am not good about the whole political thing—I am not. And I think I don’t feel comfortable in it and that is a barrier that you don’t want to do those little things that you have to do to get ahead academically or in your position on the job. (AI-F16)

I probably wasn’t even aware of so much politics go on behind the academic scene that make and break people. I’ve seen it break lots of our faculty of color. And it concerns me a lot because that is my aspiration. (AI-F16)

You do not get the Ph.D. for getting A’s in your classes or for being a good TA. You get it because of your networking skills, your ability to collaborate and cooperate and if seen as a positive role model to those around you and your ability to connect to those above and below. Your ability to get things done, your individualist ambitious aptitude and your ability to pick up things not written is what gets you through the program. (AAM-G4)

*The Socializing*

These statements seem to focus around the idea of socializing with department members, or peers and the problems students encountered.

When you see students after the class getting together for a drink, a soda, what does it have to do with the doctorate program? Well it does have to do with the doctorate program. It keeps the morale going when you are going through those intensive laboring hours of statistics or reading. (HLM-B3)

We could talk about very radical theories in class but the moment we were one on one I heard the mainstream ideology, like, “Ok how many books have you read.” (HLF-C3)

I underestimated how strong it was as far as socializing in the Master’s degree and I avoided it because I didn’t want to have to reconcile the two. I wanted to be able to be me and me meaning have my cultural identity and that positive image of myself within the African American community without having it chipped away and marginalized when I try to deal with the status quo. So what I did to navigate that I
found powerful individual alliances not corporate acceptance. (AAM-G15)

*The Cultural Transformation*

This group of expressions was very powerful and revealing of the cultural costs students pay for higher education. I found these descriptions to be very rich and dense with pertinent information.

It’s not an introverted White person who decided to go through these long hours alone. It is a very extroverted usually very sociable person who wants to get a higher degree but has to become somebody who he or she is not like—as in my case. So you have to deny your action nature and refuse to be yourself in order to endure these five to seven years of grad school. (HLM-B5)

I moved from another country and I came here all by myself and I built my world away from everybody from my family, so my family wouldn’t interfere with me. It was a very drastic measure but then I asked other minority students and it tends to be that those who need to succeed they have to pay the price of being cast out by their own kind. I thought it was just me but when I talk to others who have high GPA’s and they have minimum contact with their families, if any, I then realized that WOW, this is the price I need to pay. (HLM-B16)

Once you cross the threshold, whether you succeed or not there is no point of return. Yes physically you can always return to your neighborhood, your community and do another job. However once you cross the threshold, you are never, ever the same. (HLM-B17)

My friend Yvonne couldn’t go back to the Latino community and find a boyfriend anymore there because a Latino boyfriend could not understand the pleasure of reading a book or the pleasure of intellectual conversation which is the typical custom that you acquire through graduate school. She had to find a White boyfriend and I asked her, “Why do you like this White boy”? And she said, “He is nice to me and he understands me”. I looked at her and I didn’t have to ask anymore because I understood. That change which occurred in her
through education is what I’ve seen in myself. We were in a coffee café and he was reading a book on a Saturday afternoon, he was not intellectual and he brought cappuccino for the both of us. (HLM-B18)

You are always and will be a Latino and the same thing with African Americans. Many, many, many of my friends who are all over this nation matriculating a PhD, they tend to date African Americans or just White boys. And it is not that they deny their race but it is that we have changed. (HLM-B19)

I don’t want to have to change to fit in. Somehow the system needs to make allowances for us to be part. Do I see it happening? No, not really. (AI-F16)

**Recommendations for Change**

I felt these statements appropriately fell under the category of recommendations for improving the system.

I think some of the things that I feel would have helped me during this process would be pretty much preparedness. To have some idea of what’s going to happen and what’s expected of you and what level you need to be at or get to before you get in. (AAF-A3)

I believe that the biggest problem is right here at the training level. I think it’s the distinction between training and education—we train people and that may change the status quo—however, when you educate a person that brings about social change. Our institutions are training people to keep the same mess going. That’s the reason why women are still underpaid through they do the same job that men do—because men have been trained and not educated. (AAM-G19)

**Mentor Support**

Having a positive mentor or a role model was described as essential for success in the doctoral program. Respondents were asked to describe a supportive
environment or what types of support/person was important for the underrepresented student in the Ph.D. process. The participants had many different types of responses to this inquiry. Some had positive experiences with a mentor. However, other respondents did not have a mentor, had negative experiences with mentors or still looking to develop a mentor relationship. The data was organized into the following categories: (a) components of mentoring, (b) what positive or successful mentors do, (c) ineffective mentoring, (d) cross-racial relationships, (e) lack of a mentor and (f) reasons mentors are needed.

Components of Mentoring

In this sub-heading I grouped together all of the statements that seemed to describe the essential elements of an effective mentor relationship for underrepresented students.

I found someone who listened to me after my breaking point. He listened the first time he talked to me; he looked at me and I realized this person has an idea of what he wants to do. (HLM-A7)

Mentoring is not a practicum class or supervision class or as a result of a form you fill out or you have to create instances where people meet in a social environment. (HLM-A12)

Mentoring is unstructured but purposeful and that’s the dichotomy there. It’s unstructured because you don’t see your mentee once a week and you make yourself available as much as possible. But it is purposeful because the purpose is the mentoring. (HLM-A12)

Mentoring is all about feelings and emotional support. (HLM-A14)

Mentoring is someone whom there is a personal chemistry of sorts and it is not someone that is assigned to you. (HLF-C5)
A good mentor in higher education is a person who knows a lot and willing to give, hopefully a lot of what you need. A conversation related to my doctoral program those things I wouldn’t talk to my parents or husband about. I know I will find sources of comfort and support for emotional problems and issues in many places perhaps—but we are talking about the connection of mentoring and the doctoral program. I would say that a mentor is someone who has some sense of a vision about how he or she can influence your way of seeing life. (HLF-C6)

I think of a mentor as a personal relationship not something institutionally established. (HLF-C8)

I don’t think we need a mentor who is a warm person and hug us anytime we cry. I think we need a mentor who will be absolutely shrewd and say, “Look so and so you can feel sorry for yourself right now but look at this other possibility”. So I want people who will be honest and tell me what I am missing. (HLF-C13)

What Positive, Successful Mentors Do

Under this sub-heading I grouped together the descriptions that described the actions of an effective mentor as they interact with a student to evoke positive change.

In my Masters, I had a mentor, a person who paid attention to me who helped me out who helped me pick my classes who helped me to listen. This person listened to me, my problems was able to help me figure situations out, helped me to deal and vent when I had problems. I was in a truly, real mentoring relationship where I was just not academically supported. (HLM-A8)

My advisor is a very zealous, intellectual woman—I just love her mind and she is a very strong woman. So she is the kind of role model which is another element that I want in a mentor but you have to dig to get it. It is not something that is going to be open it is not an open book. (HLF-C8)
When I feel discouraged or if I encounter an issue I go to a very strong woman who is a mentor to many Latino women. And she says, “Well you know what if this is the system you are in and you really want to accomplish something you just have to go and take advantage of whatever technique will work for you and face the problem head on”. Without someone like that you fail to think you can make it through. (HLF-C13)

I am going to an off-campus interview and they are expecting me to teach a course when I come, so she had me teach a course similar to what I am planning on doing at this university and so after the class she gave me feedback on what to do and how to do it. She has been absolutely helpful in telling me “no” in a way that I understand and could grow from. (AAM-D4)

I think mentoring helped in that way where you can absorb things that you would not typically absorb from a stranger. (AAM-D5)

I just wanted a higher level of conversation so to speak and he provided that. He believed in me, he saw talent in me where you know a lot of the course work I took “dumbed me down.” (AAM-D5)

He allowed me to challenge the materials, to question it, to not just accept it at face value. And I mean, I question everything. And he believed in my doing that and to this day he trusts me and that’s why I consider him a mentor and I think he would consider me a mentee although we never really established or consummated a deal. (AAM-D6)

These two people were so strong politically in my program . . . so when he says my work is right no one can tell him anything. He will literally look them in the mouth and say, “Well this is my area, this is my field”, and it shuts them down completely. He would never allow an unwanted criticism or negative feedback to reach me, NEVER. It makes me feel lucky in a lot of ways but it also makes me feel that I need to become a professor. (AAM-D9)

My mentors never held my hand, they always ask, “did you think of this nor did you think of that—make a decision”. So they not only challenge me they have challenged others in my social and academic circles and they get other people to think. (AAM-D10)
Ineffective Mentors

These statements help define things that were not effective in a mentorship relationship.

I had a previous advisor who was White, she was polite to me but she did not go the extra mile to push me up. And I needed somebody to begin to push me so I could learn my way around. That is why I was bouncing back and forth, back and forth. (HLM-A7)

I had a much more intense relationship with my family than I had with the school. As a result when she saw me and I saw her we were out of synch with each other for a long time—it wasn’t really a connection there was so much difficulty. (HLF-C7)

I see a lot of people have mentors but when it is time to make decisions about the research they have to take, getting that scholarship, getting that award, or whatever, they [mentors] don’t have that political strength to make it happen for their students. (AAM-D9)

Cross-cultural Relationships

These statements go beyond mentor relationship and focus more on the cross-cultural aspects of a mentor relationship.

To be in a mentoring relationship you do not have to be with somebody from your race, it is not necessary. And I understand it is not reality because our numbers are too few. So we have to deal with what we have for the majority are White and I believe that professors have to try to get to know their students and listen to them as they describe themselves not as they are told. (HLM-A10)

The other person is the classic White-male, academe member of the national academy, one of the top educational philosophers in the field. Academically untouchable amongst his peers, he is one of the most decorated faculty members in the country. I learned from him about scholarship in a way that no one else could. Intellectually he is just on
another level and for me I needed that type of intellectual stimulation. (AAM-D5)

The Lack of a Mentor

I grouped these two statements under a sub-heading because they spoke more to the issue of not having a mentor. The fact that both discuss the problems of the African American male might emerge into something meaningful in the next rotation.

They are the first people in my life I can honestly say that served as a mentor for me all throughout my educational life, high school, elementary, middle high, undergrad, Masters, it took me until my doctoral program to just find mentors in anywhere in life. I am talking about in athletics, in social outlets, I just didn’t have mentors, I did everything on my own. (AAM-D6)

Black males don’t have that sort of person who has an established academic identity that is sort of consistent with their own. Whites for some reason find those mentors easier than I think Black males. (AAM-D14)

Reasons Mentors Are Needed

I grouped these statements under the same sub-heading because they seemed to narrow in on the reasons an underrepresented student would need a mentor.

I don’t think we can actually be able to quantify how important a mentor relationship is for a minority for the doctorate program. (HLM-A11)

I really wanted a mentor that could speak to my academic interests more than anything and to be honest. (AAM-D1)

One of my academic advisors she is almost like a mentor in a way that really helps me deal with the profession of a professor and how to teach. (AAM-D4)
I guess in every field you have a culture and I think if you can find African Americans or mentors or people of color, they tend to and not always but they tend to know the cultural landscape of a profession . . . and they know some of the challenges and road blocks and so forth. (AAM-D6)

These two people came to me at the right place in time . . . and so I've never questioned myself, I've never questioned my work. I've come to realize that I like everyone else is in the process of growing and adding on skills and so if I make a mistake I need to learn from that mistake. (AAM-D7)

I think it’s important to have mentors who have the political strength to support you as opposed to just the inner personal strength to support you. (AAM-D8)

I've made contacts all over the country and presented all over the place . . . and I needed a mentor for the dissertation and to prepare me for the job afterwards. (AAM-D10)

I have people to help me practice my craft . . . and you need mentors for that and to be critical of you to see things you didn’t see and so when you go into a committee hearing the rest of the committee doesn’t tear you apart. (AAM-D11)

Program Environment

The theme of the program environment emerged as an essential aspect of the lives of the participants within the doctoral program. There were by far more responses about the program environment than any other topic. Participants’ description of experiences covered many areas, such as their perceptions of the environment, perceptions of the faculty and administration, and things they did not understand. Thus the sub-headings evolved into the following: (a) components of a supportive environment; (b) assumption of unwelcoming; (c) lacks faculty of color; (d) missing
elements of a supportive environment; and (e) student’s defense against a hostile environment.

**Components of a Supportive Environment**

These descriptions help answer the question, “what is needed for a supportive program environment for underrepresented doctoral student?”

You are free to talk about whatever problem comes about and you do not feel hindered or threatened in anyway. You don’t feel like someone will be upset with you if you disagree with something they said or say something that’s potentially negative and they still listen and give you advice or direction. (AAF-A1)

A place where if you have any problems there is someone you can go to who if you discuss things with will remain confidential. And there are always resources there for you, and things set-up already in case you run into problems. (AAF-A1)

If there is a mechanism just in case you are sick and have to work out a way to get your work done is there anybody I can go to like an advisor to talk with. (AAM-A2)

A supportive environment is somewhere there is a support system that you can count on in case you need some help in either completing your assignments or finding out what your main area of interest is. (HLF-A2)

I think the environment when you enter should be a very neutral environment where nobody is afraid or nobody has a battle in speaking out, in asking questions or responding to any issue. (AAM-A3)

I think basically it is the same for everybody, but for underrepresented students I think it is an important fact of having a support network. (HLM-B1)
Assumptions of Unwelcoming

The descriptions under this heading define what elements of the program environment hindered the progress of students of color. These statements also explain the elements of the environment that are not helpful or appear unsupportive.

There are really quite a lot of issues that come up. I never expected it was going to be so cruel inside this place which has really set me back. (AAM-A3)

We sit around the cubicle but not at the table. I see that and it is very common. But I think the system is oppressing us, you know what I mean. (HLM-B1)

You have so many potential people moving forward, but why are not the underrepresented people moving forward. (HLM-B2)

You are not embraced by the institution most of the time, which is White. Then the majority of the classmates most of the time tend to be White and not like you. So you are different because we, the diverse student, the multi-ethnic student you are a rarity within your species. (HLM-B4)

Socially speaking in American you have White with Whites and we have diversity numbers but not intercommunication. And within the doctorate program you can't separate the intellectual individual from the social individual. (HLM-B9)

People open the doors and they believe by opening the door we are getting in and yes we are getting in, but in order to get into a house you need an invitation and you need the owner of the house to be there to welcome you, otherwise you feel like a robber or a burglar. (HLM-B13)

I do see the relationship with the group as very competitive. In the way that you just don’t ask questions. (HLF-C1)
I think the psychological portion of adapting to a doctoral program was very hard . . . I could not share that with others before because I thought that would diminish me in their eyes. (HLF-C3)

In retrospect, I would say there needs to be more of that cultural competency in understanding different groups. Cultural competency goes beyond sensitivity in ways. It would have been helpful for me if more than one professor found ways to dialog and develop a cultural competency towards me. (HLF-C4)

I cannot say that I have seen or witnessed any kind of discrimination absolutely in any way, but indirectly by not having my writing accepted, by having my speech received as confusing, and by cultural faux pas. But if you notice those things then you know there is some kind of barrier. (HLF-C12)

I thought this was my intellectual home so to speak and I was a kid in a candy store. Even though there were a lot of things that were not going my way it was still a safe haven for me. (AAM-D1)

Because it is not that I am bitter, it’s not that I am angry, I know the reality that more than likely race, experience and support are somehow connected. (AAM-D9)

But what is weird though, you see that they are successful in other parts of life, so it does make you question what’s wrong with this place where so many people can’t make it. (AAM-D12)

Where the institution support fell short was the seamless integration between when I applied and then actually getting into the program and the information that I needed from those points. It seemed like I had to find that information every step of the way. (AAF-E27)

I think it is outside the realm of being defined. It is so institutionalized that we don’t even really see it or know that it exists except that if you are on the other side of it you do. But I don’t think the people that are doing or hurting us are that intentional and they don’t really think that way. (AI-F15)
Lacks Faculty of Color

In talking about the program environment several participants spoke of the dilemma that the lack of minority faculty members creates for underrepresented students.

There is in my department no Latino professor who defines himself as a Latino mentoring students. (HLM-B2)

I think the majority of professors no matter what program you are in tend to be White. I still believe there is this belief that the system has to be fixed from the upward side whether then the professors taking control at their level. (HLM-B15)

So often your full professors, your associate professors are predominantly White. And you go through your program you might not question it but it becomes just a normal thing. The higher level faculty members are all White. And even at the assistant level they are primarily White and you go, “What’s up with that?” Eventually you question that and it has an effect on your academic self-esteem, your self-worth. (AAM-D7)

There is one African American professor in my entire discipline. So that has an impact because I suppose it would be very nice to have a role model and say this is what I can aspire to. And not having that makes you wonder if you can reach those goals. And why are there not more women and minorities in my field that I can look to. (AAF-D14)

I don’t see in the University an attempt to have more minority male and female professors. That would be one thing I think would be more inviting to other minorities to see. . . I mean for many instances you are the only minority person sitting there and it’s all White and usually the professors are Caucasian and usually European. (AAF-E23)

We have so few faculty of color that are even going to understand any dissertation that I would like to write. That makes me really apprehensive about approaching any of them because I don’t want to be discouraged from something I really want to do. (AI-F14)
Missing Elements of a Supportive Environment

These statements seemed to focus on aspects of the program that appear vague or are not made apparent to students. These descriptions also reveal the emotions of students such as frustration and anger.

Somehow intellectually we are able to do things but emotionally, we don’t have anybody who will talk to us. There is no such system and/or network system and racism exists. (HLM-B3)

I had the ideal that in a collegial environment there would be people who were much more opened-minded not only intellectually but also administratively and I saw that as a huge division. (HLF-C2)

Nothing that I heard from the beginning assured me that I would be able to finish. The uncertainty period continues till this day. Is there a support system here that will make you feel that you can go through it no matter if there is x, y, z, elements in your life? Well no I didn’t feel it and I still don’t. (HLF-C9)

I did not receive intellectual stimulation from a lot of my classes. It was just simple for me. I didn’t come to grad school to just read things and regurgitate the information or have people in the class just read and not challenge ideas, no one challenged ideas. (AAM-D5)

I feel that as a minority, my culture doesn’t exist in this university, there isn’t a Black culture. I mean there is an ink spot here and there but there really isn’t anything going on for the minorities on campus. (AAF-E23)

I think as an adult person we have a barrier of not wanting to ask some questions that need to be asked because you don’t want somebody to think how ignorant you are about the system. (AI-F15)

As I started the doctoral program I really didn’t know what critical thinking was. It wasn’t until I took a course by an African American professor who challenged everything that we said and had us write exercises on defending our positions. That’s when I realized what
critical thinking was, but that was at the end of my course work of my doctoral program. (AAM-G8)

*Student’s Defense Against a Hostile Environment*

These statements as a group seemed to define the attitudes students express in an environment that is not supportive. I felt they were using these attitudes as a defense mechanism and I believe will need to be reviewed in the next round of reduction.

We are very able to mask our ways in the same manner that a chameleon goes through when faced with a different world, a different culture that does not all together embrace yours. (HLF-C4)

I am prepared to be assertive and ask questions. And assertive is a good thing as far as I am concerned. It is just that the information isn’t being handed to you. You have to go out and get it and to do that you have to be assertive. (AAF-E15)

You have to be progressive or proactive--based on my history in undergrad and you know in high school there wasn’t anything there for me so I had to make up on my own to go get it. So when I say proactive, I don’t expect for people to ask me anything! (AAF-E22)

Even entering into the process I had to have that assertiveness to find out information to go and talk to people. I feel it would have been very different if there was some intentional effort to recruit me here. (AAF-E27)

*Whites*

This theme emerged as participants described many lived experiences with the White culture. Their statements were so assured about the behaviors of the dominant culture. It was like they had studied their actions and were very familiar with their
cultural world. Two sub-headings proved meaningful in dividing the data: (a) assumptions; and (b) whites have it better.

Assumptions

The descriptions under this sub-heading appeared to be beliefs or assumptions about the White ethnic group.

What I need to know I have learned that skill being raised in a White school system, so I do know that. (AAF-A6)

They are not the majority anymore they are White and that is a problem too. So how do you call them majority for you cannot? You cannot say they are the majority anymore but they are White. There is not a category such as the Black elite there is just Black. (HLM-B1)

White students in particular come in here with their racist, prejudiced stereotypical thinking it does not get challenged, it does not get corrected. They go out into our schools and work with our children and that’s the reason why we are disproportionately represented in special education classes. (AAM-G18)

White Students Have It Better

Several participants expressed their beliefs that White students were better prepared and had advantages over underrepresented students.

White students can naturally see role models in their professors or people around them because they see how they are and how they look alike and that make a difference. (HLM-B2)

For White students it is a completely different story. I mean they have a different perception and different experiences from us. When you see them next to us it does not seem like we are in the same world. (HLM-B14)
I believe it has a lot to do with race because in my program I see a lot of Whites overcoming whose parents have terminal degrees . . . And particularly at the more prestigious institutions almost all of their parents have advanced degrees, at least a Master’s. (AAM-C-14)

I would say in a very biased way that maybe some of the majority students, some not all, they have had different kinds of exposure or different kinds of mentoring or different kind of understanding of what the system is all about. (AAF-E11)

It is the getting received part where the dominant status quo Ph.D. candidate will just have to take one step over it. Whereas an African American may have to back up, run as fast as they can, jump and hope that somebody will stick their hand out before they drop. (AAM-G9)

But they are White; they are not used to being challenged. They are used to their word being spoken and nobody challenging it. I’ve experienced this most of my life with White supervisors who feel if it is not important then it is not important, it shouldn’t be discussed. (AAM-G18)

**Educational Experiences Before the Ph.D.**

This theme seemed relevant in identifying the descriptions of the participants about their experiences in the educational pipeline. Several of the respondents found their early preparation inadequate for the doctoral level. Some described family experiences, support mechanisms, schools and other relevant information impacted their lives in higher education. The sub-headings for this section are: (a) early influences; (b) early educational preparation; (c) early educational experiences; (d) undergraduate experiences; and (e) undergraduate faculty experiences.
Early Influences

The following categories of descriptions relate to participants’ lives before they entered higher education. They seem to give an account of the people or events that influenced the participants.

I believe I had many people that were very important. I believe that it takes a village to raise a child. And for us it has been a conjunction of many people who paved the way, who helped me make my way to come here. (HLM-B5)

I think family plays a role for my mother always pushed me to go through. Today, she is 72 and she cooks for me she gets up in the morning and prepares breakfast for me to go to school, these things make a difference. (HLM-B5)

Throughout the different periods in my life I had different people who role modeled for me who had PhDs and I said I want to be like them. And so since I was six years old I had somebody to look up to who spoke Spanish, because I was born in Chile, and had a Ph.D. (HLM-B6)

The goal of higher education was never argued in my family. My father and mother understood and pushed that school was something very good for you. (HLF-C5)

I always knew I was going to pursue a doctorate even when I was in undergrad. I think my interactions with faculty members influenced that decision. I wanted to be a faculty member and the way to do that is by pursuing my Ph.D. (AAF-E2)

I started to look for a job and it seemed like even a Master’s degree probably would not get me to where I wanted to be. Everything I wanted required a Ph.D., even in the federal government, research oriented or just to teach in a four-year college. (AAF-E4)

There was nobody back then, there was my mom and my daddy but we never had anybody encouraging us or saying, “You know you can do this or this is the way it should go.” (AAF-E6)
I realized that at one point I was more of a lifetime learner and I had to keep on going. It was something inside that kept me going. I had to learn more, I realized I wasn’t learning to be who I am. (AAF-E6)

I think most of my push and drive came through my parents and I wanted to go a little bit further than my parents. (AAF-E13)

We were always taught to be quiet and respectful to elders and that’s how I went to school. So it was difficult for me to speak up in class. To the point even that I would say that I didn’t know answers because I didn’t want to talk in class. And I did not want to EVER be the center of attention. Sometimes we had to memorize things and I would always know them but I didn’t want to have to go up there and do the work. You know we were taught to be real quiet. (AI-F2)

My parents really held education in a high regard and they wanted all of us to do well. You know be better than they were I guess because they were only high school graduates. (AI-F3)

I decided to go into education because it was important for me to be with my family when they’re home. That’s kind of a silly reason to do that but that’s why I liked to schedule things around my family. (AI-F6)

I always took classes even after I finished my Master’s degree and all of a sudden it was like a light bulb came on in my head, “Why don’t I do a Ph.D. if I am taking classes and do it towards a degree instead of just taking classes for the fun of it.” (AI-F10)

Our teachers and we had a majority of White teachers; there were only a few Black teachers at my school. Many of them said there was no reason for us to go to college because by the time we finish college there wouldn’t be any jobs. So we really weren’t encouraged to go to college. So I am glad I didn’t listen. Unfortunately a lot of my classmates believed what they were told. (AAM-G6)
**Early Educational Preparation**

This group of statements relates to the participants’ elementary and secondary levels of education. I believe it establishes the quality of education preparation participants’ received.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing that prepared me for this level. As I pursued higher degrees I felt that I wasn’t adequately prepared. I am originally from New York City, from a really poor neighborhood, and went to what I would call as I look back now inferior schools. (AAF-E5)

Did my early experiences prepare me for the Ph.D., no. Basically because I came from both high school and college which were on a predominantly White campus and there were very few minority professors and there was really no mentoring. (AAF-E12)

Being a first generational college person I was really different. I had no clue that I should have been applying for colleges in like January for example. I had never applied to colleges I was recruited to go to a big 10 university. I didn’t here that I was accepted until a week before school and they wanted me to come the next day. (AI-F3)

I moved from one school district to another and I learned the differences between school districts the hard way. I went from a school that was fairly well to do to an inner-city urban public school system. Tested out the year I got there. They thought I was smart but it wasn’t me it was the level of aptitude that they were delivering to that student body in that community. (AAM-G1)

The counselors never said anything about college and that was a barrier. My sister filled out all of the paperwork and I was accepted to a university. (AAM-G1)

The challenge with being a minority student and getting accepted to any university and your level of high school preparation was lower or you were not provided the opportunity to gain enough knowledge to hit the ground running. The assumption is that you have received for instance $100 worth of social capital, but you get here with $50 worth
of social capital. You have to ask yourself where is the other $50 worth of social capital that I am missing. The nature of this capitalist society tells you that it is your fault—something in you created the $50 deficiency. But really it was the school system and that’s why it is hard for minorities to go and seek help when they get to the university because they would have to accept the fact that either they didn’t get it or that they are deficient. And due to the individualist nature of education and you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps philosophy they automatically assume that something is wrong with me or them. (AAM-G3)

Early Educational Experiences

The statements under this category are related to educational experiences in the pre-graduate levels.

I was taking this statistics class in the four-year college and I had previously taken the same class in a community college. And I was just amazed at the first week, really I could go back to the first day; we covered material in the first day that we took the entire semester to learn. And that was a clear indicator to me that I hadn’t gotten the kind of education that I needed. (AAF-E5)

In my senior year of high school I remember joining a co-op program. The co-op program did not prepare you for college but prepared you to go out and work. You had to have pretty decent grades because you were getting half the education, because you were out so much of the time working. (AAF-E6)

I think that I am a unique case because I went to a private, college prep high school. So my 9th through 12th grades were literally four years of preparing for college. But I think I kind of share a lot of what someone else had said with regard to this still being a new experience. (AAF-E10)

I can’t really say that I felt bad because I have always been proud about being Native American. But it was always pointed out in classes and things and it just made you feel that you were different. (AI-F1)
I had the problem where teachers would tell my parents that I was not working up to my potential. I didn’t make any effort because school was easy, school was easy for me. By the time I entered high school a lots of teachers would tell my parents that I wasn’t making any effort and I should be but I didn’t need to because I was making all A’s and B’s. (AI-F2)

To give you an example of how bad it was they had no college-level courses at my high school, none, no offerings outside of school, nothing. In the 11th grade I got out after first hour and just went home because there were no classes OK. And out of 450 seniors, 7 of us went to college. (AAM-G1)

Undergraduate Experiences

I placed these expressions under the same sub-heading because they relate specifically to educational experiences in the participants undergraduate level.

I went to a Catholic institution in an urban environment. I had the luxury of being immersed in a college career where 25% of the student population was of color, which was not the norm. There were a lot of African American professors who were very much concerned about the students of color. (AAF-E2)

There is a huge difference between community college and being in a university. They were just different experiences. When I first entered the university, the classrooms are bigger. At the community college I found the teachers were very concerned, classrooms were smaller and that was a good thing. (AAF-E9)

I didn’t really get involved during that undergrad experience. I think it was my age and that I wanted to be with my family more than hanging around the college. Also I was working as the same time as I went to school. (AI-F7)

I found out something was wrong with the system when I got to the university. I had to ask, “Why did I graduate out of a whole school system?” You know I thought I was just that smart but once I arrived
at the university I realized that I wasn’t that smart. So whose fault was it? (AAM-G5)

I went from a New York City community college to a New York City college. I believe you have to deal more with culture when you are in a university environment and I want you to know that you don’t realize what the culture is. The mentality is much different here at the university when you are trying to interact, get involved, and learn things. (AAF-E8)

**Undergraduate Faculty Experiences**

These expressions relate to the participants’ experiences with undergraduate faculty and what impact it had in their future levels of education.

I think the initial exposure and interaction with the faculty helped introduce the ideal in my mind of this as a career option for me. Seeing them in the classroom, interacting with them, seeing what their job on the surface level entailed. (AAF-E3)

I met one African American faculty in community college and she was very inspiring for me. From a lot of the papers I wrote I revealed a lot of my insecurities about what I was going to do and things like that. And she always took the time to write comments. I would have to say that she was probably the most inspiring and supportive person to make me feel yes you can do this. (AI-F7)

**How Race and Ethnicity Are Addressed**

This theme seemed relevant for the issue of race. This issue was a major theme in the focus groups and interview sessions. The topic of their race seemed to run parallel with rejection of their selves from the environment and the dominant culture. These descriptions were expressed with a lot of passion. This section was divided by: (a) race issues; and (b) ethnicity issues.
Race Issues

These descriptions under this sub-heading are related because of their reference to issues of race and racism.

The myth was that there are more diverse students here and I would be treated better here than at a PWI which was my first choice and I was wrong. I was wrong it’s not numbers it’s quality. (HLM-B10)

I do think that African Americans who reach the doctoral level would say that race and cultural background and all of that gets subjected under class more than anything else. I do not see discrimination based on race an issue, more class and academic pursuit. (HLF-C13)

I encounter these situations of how the issues of race are either glossed over or not fully discussed because majority class members are uncomfortable about some of this topic. (AAF-E19)

I think it always happens as being a person of color and understanding the subtleties of race that you question and wonder about each incident or conversation with the majority. (AAF-E21)

I think that the racial issues here are just glossed over. I say that again because I don’t see the University here trying to do something to make this a more diverse place. (AAF-E23)

Well I do feel that I am acknowledged as a person of color by my peers; but not necessarily by the faculty. (AI-F11)

I don’t feel treated as an equal and I can’t really put my finger on why. (AI-F15)

I think in general, systemically that White America has a serious difficulty understanding the contemporary African American experience and the African American males’ experience specifically. I believe that they have difficulty understanding it because they really don’t have to; being mainstream and being the majority and not facing the same barriers. They really don’t have to think about what happens to us. Racial profiling is not important to them because they don’t get pulled over. They don’t get followed around in stores as most of us African
American males do, even being doctoral students. And I think mainstream White America is so quick to say that we are just too sensitive and we always pull the race card. (AAM-G11)

**Ethnicity Issues**

Under this sub-heading I listed the expressions that were not shared experiences across the underrepresented groups. As important as they seem, I will probably save them for a future study on individual ethnic group experiences.

My intellectual background as an immigrant, everything that I achieved does not appear in my records in the United States. I taught in both universities in Paraguay before coming here. I was one of the youngest assistant professors. None of that appears on my current record. So it is as if they cut your life away. It was not so problematic that I was losing that experience but that it was not being recognized. (HLF-C11)

I identify very strongly with my culture and heritage and face a lot of the same issues as other minorities. But at the same time my struggle might not be as visible to other people as other minority groups. (AI-F11)

These potential themes represent the first cycle of the description phase. The next section reveals the second cycle of reduction in the on-going synergist process. The original descriptions and themes will undergo a further phase of reduction and yield the intermediate phase of themes.

**Essential Themes**

The phenomenological process at this step calls for organizing the themes into a description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The process renders a small number of broader themes or categories that appear as major findings of the study.
The following thematization of ideas represents the blending of interactions between the researcher and the participants. This synergistic process resulted in the following essential themes: (a) the people; (b) the doctoral program; (c) the acculturation process; and (d) Whites have it better.

The People

This theme seemed appropriate to explain the experiences of the participants and their encounters with people that shaped their perceptions of education, specifically the post-secondary level. For instance, the majority of the participants came from families that wanted the children to succeed but had no understanding of the educational system, such as described by the following respondents:

For my family it is like work and make money; and that is what life is all about. (AAF-A6)

They don’t understand because there is nothing they can compare it to. (HLM-B17)

They have no clue what going to college entails and even now my mother who is living with me doesn’t understand that. (AI-F13)

Another message that seemed to resonate from participants is that success in the educational arena means to isolate from friends and family members that did not understand their goal of educational, as this Hispanic/Latino male explains:

I moved from another country and I came here all by myself and I built my world away from everybody from my family, so my family wouldn’t interfere with me. It was a very drastic measure but then I asked other minority students and it tends to be that those who need to succeed they have to pay the price of being caste out by their own kind. I thought it was just me but when I talk to others who have high
GPA’s and they have minimum contact with their families, if any, I then realized that WOW, this is the price I need to pay. (HLM-B16)

This theme is also appropriate to explain the people of interest in this study, the participants themselves. Although all of the participants are classified as under-represented, they come from varied educational backgrounds. Some participants went through undergraduate, graduate and doctoral as part-time students (AI-F10); while others advanced as full-time students. A few members of this study started elementary school in other countries and transferred into graduate schools in the United States (HLM-B6). Several members of this study entered graduate school from inferior inner-city school districts (AAM-G1). One African American participant graduated from a prestigious rated, college-prep high school:

I think that I am a unique case because I went to a private, college prep high school. So my 9th through 12th grades were literally four years of preparing for college. But I think I kind of share a lot of what someone else had said with regard to this still being a new experience. (AAF-E10)

Another group of people that influenced participants’ lives were their teachers and professors. Overall, the recollections of lived experiences with these people were not positive. In other words, there were statements of teachers and faculty members being unconcerned, insensitive, or not involved enough to make a positive impact:

Our teachers and we had a majority of White teachers; there were only a few Black teachers at my school. Many of them said there was no reason for us to go to college because by the time we finished college there wouldn’t be any jobs. So we really weren’t encouraged to go to college. So I am glad I didn’t listen. Unfortunately a lot of my classmates believed what they were told. (AAM-G6)

Did my early experiences prepare me for the PhD? “NO”! Basically, I came from both high school and college which were on a predominantly
White campus and there were very few minority professors and really no mentoring. (AAF-E12)

I received so much campus resistance, you know, “You can’t do this in four years”. And you know that is disappointing because you don’t know what to think of it. Is it about the skill level that they perceived me to have or is it about they just thinking that most people take longer than four years to do it. (AAM-D2)

Some White professors delegate the responsibilities that should be on their shoulders by diffusing or delegating the student to other minority professors because they think they can do better—and sometimes they do but sometimes they don’t. (HLM-B9)

All of the reported lived experiences with dominant faculty members were not negative. Many of the participants had positive encounters with faculty in their undergraduate programs and/or community college. Mentors, rolemodels and certain faculty members proved to be positive influencers in participants’ lives, as these respondents explain:

In my Masters, I had a mentor, a person who paid attention to me who helped me out who helped me pick my classes who helped me to listen. This person listened to me, my problems was able to help me figure situations out, helped me to deal and vent when I had problems. I was in a truly, real mentoring relationship where I was just not academically supported. (HLM-A8)

He allowed me to challenge the materials, to question it, to not just accept it at face value. And I mean, I question everything. And he believed in my doing that and to this day he trusts me and that’s why I consider him a mentor and I think he would consider me a mentee although we never really established or consummated a deal. (AAM-D6)
The Doctoral Program

This theme seemed appropriate to describe the experiences of participants within the doctoral program, covering their perceptions and reservations of the environment. The majority of African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and American-Indian respondents were the first person in their families to reach the level of doctoral student. This factor significantly impacted their view of the doctoral environment as illustrated in the following statements:

I felt like I was lacking because as a first generation student I did not understand the culture. Even now I feel like I should be getting more support. I should know more information and doing things that I am not doing. I do not know what those things are because there is nobody to tell me. (AAF-E7)

This is still a new experience because no one in my family has reached the doctorate level. And so being a first generation, I still don't understand this system. And I feel like I am learning this process along with going through the process of being a doctoral student which in some sense makes it a little bit more challenging. And I feel some colleagues already know what this process is all about. (AAF-E10)

It seemed as if being a first generational student helped justify problems and difficulties within their doctoral program, such as this African American male explains:

Because coming from an underrepresented group I am a first generation student. So you come in and you don’t have a clue about anything. (AAM-A3)

Many participants described their program environment as cold and many aspects of it unwelcoming. The different school settings did not seem to vary the
impact this perception as much as race/ethnicity, as described by these Hispanic/Latino and African American male:

You are not embraced by the institution most of the time, which is White. Then the majority of the classmates most of the time tend to be White and not like you. So you are different because we, the diverse student, the multi-ethnic student are a rarity within your species. (HLM-B4)

Because it is not that I am bitter, it’s not that I am angry, I know the reality that more than likely race, experience and support are somehow connected. (AAM-D9)

Many of the respondents connected the under-representation of faculty of color as an indicator of an unwelcoming environment. Others described experiences with mainstream faculty who had difficulty relating to them culturally. Similarly, a few participants expressed negative experiences with mainstream faculty members which enhanced the unwelcoming theme of their doctoral programs:

Well there has not been anyone if I have asked them to give me information or help me has said no. I have gotten, “Oh I haven’t got time” or like when I was trying to form my committee there were many teachers, MANY who said, “I am just overwhelmed already I cannot take another student.” (AAF-E15)

I think there is a lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of the professors. I also think it is very difficult to tell a professor who has reached that stage of what it is that he or she doesn’t seem to understand or know culturally. (HLF-C4)

So often your full professors, your associate professors are predominantly White. And you go through your program you might not question it but it becomes just a normal thing. The higher level faculty members are all White. And even at the assistant level they are primarily White and you go, “What’s up with that?” Eventually you question that and it has an effect on your academic self-esteem, your self-worth. (AAM-D7)
Throughout the focus groups and face-to-face discussions the participants described that their difficulties in the program did not come from a lack of intelligence, but more from missing information. In the following statements some participants will explain this dilemma:

I did not have any idea, absolutely no idea of how the process works. I had no idea of how to talk with an advisor I had no idea of what I was suppose to do or what I could have expected from her. I had no idea there were so many of what I call internal politics in the department that I needed to be aware of, to navigate in an easy way and that is so important. (HLF-C2)

I think some of the things that I feel would have helped me during this process would be pretty much preparedness. To have some ideal of what’s going to happen and what’s expected of you and what level you need to be at or get to before you get in. (AAF-A3)

You do not get the Ph.D. for getting A’s in your classes or for being a good TA. You get it because of your networking skills, your ability to collaborate and cooperate and if seen as a positive role model to those around you and your ability to connect to those above and below. Your ability to get things done, your individualist ambitious aptitude and your ability to pick up things not written is what gets you through the program. (AAM-G4)

I guess in every field you have a culture and I think if you can find African Americans or mentors or people of color, they tend to and not always but they tend to know the cultural landscape of a profession . . . and they know some of the challenges and road blocks and so forth. (AAM-D6)

The Acculturation Process

This theme seemed appropriate to describe the cultural transformation participants experienced while adapting to higher education and to the dominant culture within post-secondary institutions. For instance, some talked about the permanent
cultural change that happens to the individual, as this Hispanic/Latino male describes his friend:

My friend Yvonne couldn’t go back to the Latino community and find a boyfriend anymore there because a Latino boyfriend could not understand the pleasure of reading a book or the pleasure of intellectual conversation which is the typical custom that you acquire through graduate school. She had to find a White boyfriend and I asked her, “Why do you like this White boy”? And she said, “He is nice to me and he understands me”. I looked at her and I didn’t have to ask anymore because I understood. That change which occurred in her through education is what I’ve seen in myself. We were in a coffee café and he was reading a book on a Saturday afternoon, he was not intellectual and he brought cappuccino for the both of us. (HLM-B18)

Others described the dilemma of the different cultures like these African American males:

I believe African Americans experience two worlds due to the fact that they live in two different cultures and most people learn to blend the two. (AAM-G12)

You know that African American males have to make tough decisions; one is how much of the African American male culture can come to the door of the Ph.D., and has to be left at the door as you step into the Ph.D. door...the culture of White America is not as strong, but in the African American culture it is different. Family ties, camaraderie of your peers, loyalty to those that have taken care of you, wisdom or what you consider to be life lessons given from grandma don’t seep into the dominant status quo culture—and so you have got to find ways to reconcile those differences and philosophies. (AAM-G12)

Many participants described effective measures they found to contend with their described difficulties. Some found support in religion, like explained in the following passages:

And then spiritual, physical and emotional support—it is basically learning how to have a balanced life in this type of environment
otherwise you will be so stressed out. You know you can make it but you will make it with gray hair. (AAF-A4)

I think as underrepresented students we have God and other defense mechanisms as tools to become invisible when we need to. (HLF-C4)

It was sort of like I got a precursor—the Lord gave me a little taste—He gave me a nice big plate of crow to eat and lowered my pride first of all and second he gave me an understanding of what it takes to get the job done. (AAM-G5)

Many students adapted a determined attitude to make it though the different stages and difficulties:

I thought I am going to make it no matter what and I believed in what I was doing was right. (HLM-B7)

I am a very self-sufficient individual so I tend not to rely on a lot of people. But then in the doctoral program you realized that you cannot take that type of approach you won’t survive. (AAM-D1)

I’m probably different than most because of my excitement level that I’ve maintained throughout my doctoral program . . . I’ve been very involved as soon as I got on campus, I became involved in a number of organizations, programs that connected with students, I’ve had a great support network. (AAM-D1)

However, peer support was by far the most effective defense to a hostile environment, getting appropriate information about the program, and against loneliness:

I always found one person that I could go and talk to and so for me that is very important. (HLF-A3)

And so somehow get some sort of peer based support . . . I joined [graduate student organization] and that kind of helped me to just listen to different people and what they are going through. (AAF-A4)
I don’t have family here; but family wise we actually gather strength from each other. (AAM-A5)

You keep trying to find out information from other students because it is only students who are telling me, “Maybe you should be looking for a committee right now.” (AAF-E7)

I have made networks with other graduate students and that has been very interesting because when you make these networks they share things with you so you don’t feel that you are on the outside looking in. (AAF-E13)

At this level I feel that the support of other students is essential. I think if I didn’t have friends that were in this program and other people that are going through these experiences, especially other students of color I wouldn’t have stuck with it. (AI-F10)

I think it is my colleagues that I am taking classes with, the other students I associate with we make some kind of system. We don’t know exactly everybody’s situation but there is enough commonality between us that we can just breathe and know there is a support system that is important. (AI-F16)

One African American male had an excellent recommendation regarding success that I thought was appropriate for this theme:

I think everybody that enters a doctoral program needs to establish their academic identity quickly. What I mean is they need to find a project, they need to find an approach, they need to define a paradigm, and they need to find who they are academically and quickly. (AAM-D13)

White Students Have It Better

This theme helped identify the statements throughout the focus group sessions and face-to-face interviews. Overwhelmed and frustrated, these underrepresented students’ perceived major differences between themselves and their White
peers in every category. For instance, they perceived a difference even if the White student was a first-generational, burdened with poverty or any social situation, Whites students were preferred:

White students can naturally see role models in their professors or people around them because they see how they are and how they look alike and that makes a difference. (HLM-B2)

For White students it is a completely different story. I mean they have a different perception and different experiences from us. When you see them next to us it does not seem like we are in the same world. (HLM-B14)

I believe it has a lot to do with race because in my program I see a lot of Whites overcoming whose parents have terminal degrees... And particularly at the more prestigious institutions almost all of their parents have advanced degrees, at least a Master’s. (AAM-C14)

I would say in a very biased way that maybe some of the majority students, some not all, they have had different kinds of exposure or different kinds of mentoring or different kinds of understanding of what the system is all about. (AAF-E11)

It is the getting received part where the dominant status quo Ph.D. candidate will just have to take one step over it. Whereas an African American may have to back up, run as fast as they can, jump and hope that somebody will stick their hand out before they drop. (AAM-G9)

But they are White; they are not used to being challenged. They are used to their word being spoken and nobody challenging it. I’ve experienced this most of my life with White supervisors who feel if it is not important than it is not important, it shouldn’t be discussed. (AAM-G18)

There seemed a belief that the White culture was more of an ideology, a pervasive attitude in higher education. This pervasive attitude seemed to be described as one that did not have room or know how to accommodate the underrepresented cultures:
They are not the majority anymore they are White and that is a problem too. So how do you call them majority for you cannot? You cannot say they are the majority anymore but they are White. There is not a category such as the Black elite there is just Black. (HLM-B1)

White students in particular come in here with their racist, prejudiced stereotypical thinking it does not get challenged, it does not get corrected. They go out into our schools and work with our children and that’s the reason why we are disproportionately represented in special education classes. (AAM-G18)

While I would like to think there are White people out there that would support me . . . in most cases that is not the case. I’ve rarely seen a White male support a Black male the way this guy does. (AAM-D10)

I think more often than not faculty members do not grab a hold of Black males and say this is the identity I want you to have. Or they force one upon them that is completely inconsistent with who they are. (AAM-D13)

I don’t really feel that my ethnic background is really acknowledged here. I’ve checked with the office of diversity and received very little response. They always say that they are here for the African American students. I think it’s hard because I always think of myself as a minority person and we are probably the minutest group of minority people. (AI-D10)

Summary

The original and second level of themes represents the experiences of African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. Using the phenomenological process, 150 pages of transcripts were reduced into 11 original themes. These themes represent the first reduction analysis of the perceptions, lived experiences, and reservations of underrepresented doctoral student. A subsequent analysis was conducted to further reduce the data, yielding four secondary themes: (1) the
doctoral process; (2) the people; (3) the acculturation process; and (4) Whites have it better.

In Chapter V a final synergistic reduction of the data will be compared and contrasted with the research literature. Ultimately, the researcher will encapsulate this information in a revelatory phrase depicting the essence of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students in post-secondary institutions.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The underlying concern throughout this study is that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students have higher attrition rates than White doctoral students. Research to date on this topic has focused on causes and barriers that apply to all doctoral students, not on particular cultural barriers that may adversely affect doctoral persistence among underrepresented groups (CGS, 2004; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001). While the barriers for mainstream and underrepresented groups may be similar, there may also be unique factors that affect persistence among underrepresented groups which have not been researched.

The goal of this chapter is to bring to conclusion the meanings associated with being an African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral student in post-secondary institutions. A key purpose of this dissertation is to provide information on the institutional and cultural barriers these students encounter which impact their attrition levels. The research summarized within Chapter II examined the legal climate surrounding public schools and higher education, as well as identified existing cultural and institutional barriers that impacted doctoral student outcomes.

In this chapter, conclusions are organized by research questions as part of the final reduction of the original and secondary themes. These conclusions are based on
the final synergist reduction which includes the researchers’ interpretation of the data. These conclusions will be compared with previous research literature on these topics. Another section will address how these findings can enhance the field of higher education. Lastly, the limitations and recommendations for future study are also detailed.

Research Question #1: What are the key cultural barriers that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students encounter in their doctoral programs?

Lingering Impact of Segregation

A re-examination of the transcripts and themes revealed that participants who evolved from elementary schools during the height of the “civil rights era” did not experience the destiny of hope legislated through the various Acts surmised in Chapter II. What this study found is that although participants gained access to higher education they still endured disparate conditions at various levels of education, which impacted them at the post-secondary level. In addition to the disparate educational services these students and their families often had to balance socio-economic realities such as poverty, chronic illness, and unemployment, which exasperate the difficulty of the division.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a 1965 commencement speech at Howard University, explains the dilemma of educational inequities on people of color who had to contend with multiple levels of inequities. The following passage contains excerpts of his monumental talk:

. . . Thus we have seen the high court of the country declare that discrimination based on race was repugnant to the Constitution, and therefore void. . . But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away
the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, “you are free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates . . . to this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man . . . For Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences—deep, corrosive, obstinate differences—radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual. . . Perhaps most important . . . is the breakdown of the Negro family structure. For this, most of all, white Americans must accept responsibility. It flows from centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro man. It flows from the long years of degradation and discrimination, which have attacked his dignity and assaulted his ability to produce for his family. (President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965)

Reflecting back to the year 1965 and the speech President Johnson made, both proved to be instrumental to the educational experiences of the participants and on the issue of cultural and institutional barriers. First, 1965 was the eleventh year since the United States Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education, ended the legal idea of “separate but equal” accommodations in public education, defined in 1896 by Plessy v. Ferguson. The year prior to the speech, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and in August of 1965, he signed the Voting Rights Act (Fraleigh & Tuman, 1997). In 1968, the Civil Rights Act was amended and strengthened to cover fair housing. These measures were legislated for all citizens of the United States to have an equal opportunity to services, education and housing (Fraleigh & Tuman,
Many of the participants, in June of 1965, were ending their first years in elementary education, some were seeking to enter public secondary schools and a few were starting education in public pre-school.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* Court recognized the negative psychological impact of segregation on minority children. These participants described experiences in their elementary, secondary, and undergraduate phases in which they perceived different or inferior services (i.e., curriculum, classrooms, and teachers) to that of their White peers. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Klein (2002) and Wilson (2004), which found that the desegregation order of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Court was never fully achieved in American public schools.

Several researchers (Daniel Tatum, 1997; Nieto, 2004; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997) found empirical support for the negative psychological effect of disparate services on the core beliefs and learning of elementary, secondary and undergraduate children, youth and young adults. This research confirms those findings and expands the research on long-term effects of this type of treatment on the underrepresented adult learner such as this African American respondent explains:

> I found out something was wrong with the system when I got to the university. I had to ask, “Why did I graduate out of a whole school system?” You know I thought I was just that smart but once I arrived at the university I realized that I wasn’t that smart. So whose fault was it? (AAM-G5)

*The Need to Reject Their Natural Culture*

Studies (e.g., Santos & Rigual, 1994; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Smith & Moore, 2002) discovered that students who had a large degree of understanding and
interaction with the dominant culture before entering higher education would better navigate the human dynamics of their doctoral program. This study found that all of the participants described entering their doctoral programs with expectations of success and confidence based on their previous educational victories. For example, once notified of acceptance into their program of study the participants were excited, confident of their futures and felt assured that their determined attitudes would get them through their programs. In fact, one participant said, “I was very, very excited, I was excited because I am the first generation doctoral student in my immediate family and I really didn’t give a lot of other things as much thought, all I wanted to do was get in” (AAM-D1).

However, as the participants engaged in their programs of study, their determined attitudes and confidence were replaced with feelings of: (a) uncertainty of the future; (b) being suspicious of the dominant culture; (c) missing important information for successful graduation; (d) a perception that their ethnic and cultural selves were not accepted, acknowledged or discussed in their classes or with peers; and (e) that their early educational experiences did not prepare them for success at this level.

These underrepresented students felt isolated and forced to navigate a system in an unfamiliar environment. Consequently, there were many statements of aggressive and assertive attitudes in encounters with dominant group members and their expressed emotions became frustration, anger and hopelessness. This information confirms and expands the finding of Greer-Williams (2001). In applying her study, she concluded that African American and Hispanic/Latino groups were prone to express aggressive and assertive attitudes in encounters with the dominant group in
organizations. These findings help explain the reasons for the hostile attitude of these ethnic group members in their doctoral programs.

To cope with human dynamics within their doctoral programs, the participants found the most effective strategy was contrary to that espoused by Austin (2002), who said that a student’s sense of self-efficacy and their ability to make effective connections with other cultures would lead to success. This study uncovered findings more similar to Daniel Tatum (1997) and Nieto (2004), which involved assuming the dominant culture’s values and ways while de-emphasizing their personal cultural characteristics. The participants’ families, friends and ethnic culture, while a source of comfort and fortitude, proved to be hindrances to success at higher levels of education. The solution defined by most of the respondents was to reject their ethnic natures, core values and beliefs in order to assimilate more of the dominant groups’ customary beliefs, social forms and material traits. This acculturation meant a self-imposed isolation from these students’ inner support systems, their family and friends, for an extended period of time, as noted by the following:

Once you cross the threshold, whether you succeed or not there is no point of return. Yes physically you can always return to your neighborhood, your community and do another job. However once you cross the threshold, you are never, ever the same. (HLM-B17)

My friend Yvonne couldn’t go back to the Latino community and find a boyfriend anymore there because a Latino boyfriend could not understand the pleasure of reading a book or the pleasure of intellectual conversation which is the typical custom that you acquire through graduate school. She had to find a White boyfriend and I asked her, “Why do you like this White boy”? And she said, “He is nice to me and he understands me”. I looked at her and I didn’t have to ask anymore because I understood. That change which occurred in her through education is what I’ve seen in myself . . . (HLM-B18)
Daniel Tatum (1997) determined that identity is formed through a complex means of integration of socio-economic status, family values, school values, peer pressures, community, and the media. These participants enhanced findings from Tatum's study by revealing the pressures of higher education on the adult identity:

It's not an introverted White person who decided to go through these lone hours. It is a very extroverted usually very sociable person who wants to get a higher degree but has to become somebody who he or she is not like—as in my case. So you have to deny your action nature and refuse to be yourself in order to endure these five to seven years of grad school. (HLM-B5)

I feel that as a minority, my culture doesn't exist in this university, there isn't a Black culture. (AAF-E23)

Educational experts discovered that habitus and cultural capital are major indicators of success in education at the K-doctorate level (Dumais, 2002; Mickelson, 2003). Dumais (2002) defined habitus as a person's view of the world and his or her perception of their place in that world. Further, cultural capital was the accumulation of the dominant class' socio-cultural values (Dumais, 2002). This research advances Dumais' (2003) and Mickelson's (2003) studies on the theory of social capital by adding in the factor of race and the effect of socio-economic realities encountered by many underrepresented students living in urban communities, as espoused by the following respondent:

The challenge with being a minority student and getting accepted to any university and your level of high school preparation was lower or you were not provided the opportunity to gain enough knowledge to hit the ground running. The assumption is that you have received for instance $100 worth of social capital, but you get here with $50 worth of social capital. You have to ask yourself where is the other $50 worth of social capital that I am missing. The nature of this capitalist society tells you that it is your fault—something in you created the
$50 deficiency. But really it was the school system and that’s why it is hard for minorities to go and seek help when they get to the university because they would have to accept the fact that either they didn’t get it or that they are deficient. And due to the individualist nature of education and you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps philosophy they automatically assume that something is wrong with me or them. (AAM-G3)

Martinez and Aguirre (2003) found a cultural chasm over the meanings of social events between underrepresented students in the program. This study confirms and increases the depth of their conclusions by showing that chasm of misunderstanding extends far beyond the social aspect to affecting relationships with dominant group peers, faculty and committee members.

Research Question #1 Summary

In summary, this study revealed that underrepresented adults continue to harbor negative psychological injury due to the dual standards in public education among underrepresented and dominant group members. The impact of the damage affects both the learning style and the students’ identity. These changes to the students’ identity and learning styles transpire over time and are often masked by assertive and aggressive attitudes when confronted by the dominant group. Within the realm of higher education the cultural attitudes (i.e. aggression and assertion) transform from strengths into insecurities.

Research Question #2: What are the key institutional barriers that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students encounter in their doctoral programs?
Filtered Through a White Lens

The surmised research from Chapter II on public education (e.g., Duran, 1996; Jalomo, 2003; Landsman, 2001; Leon, 2003; Martinez & Aguirre, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997) discovered the following institutional conditions exist that impact underrepresented student outcomes: (a) teachers, principals are predominantly White; (b) curriculum and educational policies established according to White, upper-middle class, English-speaking, male values; (c) teachers are taught primarily to work with White, middle-class students; and (d) students of color were more likely to be suspended, victims of corporal punishment, and receive negative treatment for their behaviors in class than White students.

The participants’ experiences in elementary, secondary, and undergraduate levels were consistent with the studies surmised in Chapter II. This qualitative study advances the knowledge from those studies by revealing how the impact of disparate conditions in early levels increased the division of academic preparedness between underrepresented and White students as they advanced into higher education.

Too Many Unknowns

African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and American Indians have many different cultural and ethnic variations within sub-groups and complex life factors, understanding of the educational system that is not apparent on the traditional enrollment form. For example, of the African American and Hispanic/Latino participants, four were born in other countries and became citizens. These participants have different
educational background paths, matriculation styles, family makeup and family responsibilities which impact their doctoral program. This information however would not be revealed on most enrollment forms. Leon (1993) concluded that the White group is not aware of all the ethnic variances within a racial/ethnic group. This study agreed with his conclusions and added the perspective of international, domestic and diverse voices to increase the level of knowledge.

Another finding was that many important factors which impact educational outcomes are not consciously known to underrepresented students until they encounter these institutional barriers and then need immediate resolutions, as stated:

People open the doors and they believe by opening the door we are getting in and yes we are getting in. But in order to get into a house you need an invitation and you need the owner of the house to be there to welcome you, otherwise you feel like a robber or a burglar. (HLM-B13)

Dore and Golde (2001) concluded that many doctoral students at every stage of their program did not clearly understand what doctoral study entailed, how to work the process, or how to navigate it effectively. Findings from this study are consistent with Dore and Golde (2001), and adding this view from underrepresented doctoral students has enhanced the scholarship of research. This study found many descriptions of not being prepared, not knowing what was needed, and not being fully integrated into the system, such as described by these underrepresented doctoral students:

Where the institution support fell short was the seamless integration between when I applied and then actually getting into the program and the information that I needed from those points. It seemed like I had to find that information every step of the way. (AAF-E27)
Blackwell (1981) and Ibarra (2001) noted that most graduate schools were negligent in their efforts to mount well-organized, systematic, recruitment programs designed specifically for students of color. Similar conclusions are drawn from this study, and included the perspectives of contemporary diverse doctoral students.

**Few Good Mentors Available**

The underrepresented students in this study unanimously agreed that: (a) formalized mentor relationships were not as effective as those that are unstructured; (b) every underrepresented student accepted into a doctoral program needs a mentor/role model before the first day of class; (c) mentors must be absolutely shrewd, honest, have political strength and be willing to be educated in cultural competency; and (d) African American males were the least likely of any group to have an effective cross-cultural relationship.

Harris (2002) focused on the specific benefits of mentoring in higher education. Overall, at the graduate level, she concluded that students with a mentor had a higher rate of involvement in professional activities, higher grades, more scholarly research activities, and publications than students who lacked mentors. The conclusions of this study regarding reasons mentors are needed in higher education were consistent with the findings of Harris (2002).

Mertz and Pfleeger (2002) reported that cross-cultural mentor relationships did not work if the mentor (usually from the mainstream group) viewed the protégée as less qualified because of his or her race/ethnicity or gender. In addition, a lack of success in one mentor relationship had a negative effect on all future cross-cultural
mentor pairs. The conclusions of this dissertation on cross-cultural mentor relationships varied significantly from those results found in Mertz and Pfleeger’s (2002) study in that participants found a cross-cultural relationship can be just as effective and meaningful as with a faculty member of color.

Inadequate Financial Support

An important finding emerged from this study regarding inadequate financial support for these students of color. This research discovered that inadequate support did prolong educational quests, determined if a student had to matriculate on a full or part-time basis, and affected their ability to socialize. Previous research had found inadequate finances to be a significant barrier. Overall, this study found that inadequate support was not as a severe of a concern within the doctoral program as were issues surrounding race/ethnicity.

For example, Lovitts (2001) stated that the most common reason noncompleters gave for their attrition was not being able to meet their financial obligations. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) suggested that students who were forced to rely primarily on their own resources had higher attrition rates and longer spans of time-to-degree than those who received adequate financial aid, fellowships and assistantships. In addition, Pruitt (1987) determined that adequate financial support is important for successful completion and a factor in students being pressured to leave before graduation. For underrepresented doctoral students, inadequate funding was of concern, but it was not viewed as a primary barrier to success.
Program Environment Lacks Color

The participants expanded the definition of a quality program environment as used in the CGS (2004) report by describing the informal support systems important to students of color. The premier example participants gave of an unwelcoming environment was the lack of faculty of color. Another important feature of this research was to define what aspects of a program environment are not clear or appear as unwelcoming to students of color. These respondents also clarified the messages students of color receive and internalize because of the deficit of minority faculty.

The CGS (2004) report indicated that there are informal elements within graduate departments that contribute to a supportive student climate. The informal elements were defined as opportunities to participate in department events, regular social gatherings, team sports, and a comfortable lounge with refreshments, professional publications, bulletin boards listing activities in the discipline, and visible recognition of student achievements. Diverse faculty members were viewed as an essential element for a supportive, pluralistic department environment (Viernes Turner, 1999). Additionally, the participants described problems with faculty members of color who no longer identified or could relate to them, as these participants explain:

There is in my department no Latino professor who defines himself as a Latino mentoring students. (HLM-B2)

In retrospect, I would say there needs to be more of that cultural competency in understanding different groups. Cultural competency goes beyond sensitivity in ways. It would have been helpful for me if more than one professor found ways to dialog and develop a cultural competency towards me. (HLF-C4)
Need to Unlock the Gateways via Quality Advising

Overwhelmingly, participants described that a quality advisor was the most important element for navigating all phases of their program successfully and the most difficult for them to find. A review of the research on this topic concluded that the standard doctoral education program required students to complete a series of stages along the road to degree completion (Lovitts, 2001). Bowen and Rudenstine, (1992) identified the stages as coursework completion, program approval, dissertation committee selection, preliminary and qualifying exams, and in some programs, satisfying a foreign language requirement. Seymour and Hewitt (1997) concluded that success in doctoral training was linked to the student being prepared for the process of matriculation before entering their program of study. Colchado (2003) and Seymour and Hewitt (1997) determined that most underrepresented students felt that their high school and undergraduate experiences did not prepare them for the general knowledge students were expected to have in graduate school.

The participants from this study were at various stages of matriculation, and the following narrative explains their uncertainty experienced through each phase:

Nothing that I heard from the beginning assured me that I would be able to finish. The uncertainty period continues till this day. Is there a support system here that will make you feel that you can go through it no matter if there is x, y, z, elements in your life? Well no I didn’t feel it and I still don’t. (HLF-C9)

This problem of finding an appropriate advisor affirms Lovitts’ (2001) findings, and adds the views of underrepresented students. Moreover, this study clarified Bowen and Rudenstine’s (1992) conclusion that a negative encounter in the
dynamics of the advisor/student relationship was detrimental to the student and caused him or her to drift without guidance for a precious period of time, as revealed by the following statements:

Well I haven't had someone say, "Well I like this part that you have wrote now you can expand on this and do such and such or these are the next steps that you should be taking." (AI-F15)

Well there has not been anyone if I have asked them to give me information or help me has said no. I have gotten, 'Oh I haven't got time' or like when I was trying to form my committee there were many teachers, MANY who said, "I am just overwhelmed already I cannot take another student." (AAF-E15)

**Insufficient Exposure to Academia**

Only one participant out of the 15 had sufficient training, mentoring and exposure to the life of a faculty member, although many hoped to become a faculty member upon graduation. Adams (2002) and Austin (2002) examined doctoral students' orientation to the life of a new faculty member and discovered that very few doctoral graduates have sufficient exposure. This study expands the scholarship of the previous studies with the standpoint of this race/gender member:

I am going to an off-campus interview and they are expecting me to teach a course when I come, so she had me teach a course similar to what I am planning on doing at this university and so after the class she gave me feedback on what to do and how to do it . . . (AAM-D4)

**Research Question #2 Summary**

Overall, in reference to Research Question #2, the information collected through the analysis illuminates the institutional barriers in public elementary,
secondary, and undergraduate levels that impact underrepresented students in post-secondary institutions. These barriers identified as: (a) the prevalence of the White race in the curriculum, administration, and standards for behavior; (b) the standard enrollment and screening applications are not sufficient to identify diverse students’ characteristics or needs; (c) mentors were found to be necessary for success in higher education, however, problems emerged that prevented effective mentor relationships; (d) inadequate financial support prolongs educational quests; (e) a lack of minority faculty results in an unwelcoming program environment to students of color; (f) a quality advisor is essential to success in all phases of the doctoral program; and (g) only a few students are adequately prepared for a future in higher education.

Research Question #3: What are the key support systems, which African American, Hispanic/Latino and American-Indian students report as benefiting them in terms of completing a doctoral program?

*It’s the Inside Components not the Outside Packaging*

Several studies (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Blackwell, 1981, 1987; Carnegie Foundation, 2001; CGS, 2004; Daloz, 1999; Goodchild et al., 1997; Harris, 2002; Viernes Turner, 1999) in Chapter II examined support systems in higher education. Having an effective mentor for every phase of the doctoral program was one key conclusion of the previous studies (Carnegie Foundation, 2001; CGS, 2004; Daloz, 1999; Goodchild et al., 1997). This study expands the scholarship on mentoring doctoral students of color by revealing that cross-cultural relationships can be just as meaningful and effective for students as a relationship with faculty of color. Several studies (e.g., Blackwell, 1987; Bowen & Rudenstine; 1992; Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002) examined
cross-cultural mentor relationships and the status of minority faculty members and determined there was not enough faculty of color to be mentors, which meant that students were limited to White male mentors. The participants in this study however, were able to find meaningful mentor relationships with the dominant group as illustrated:

    But we’ve hired two new faculty White females and so I was interested in their type of research and I told them I wanted to interact with them and work with them and they have been really good. (AAF-E13)

    The other person is the classic White-male, academe member of the national academy, one of the top educational philosophers in the field. Academically untouchable amongst his peers, he is one of the most decorated faculty members in the country. . . to this day he trusts me and that’s why I consider him a mentor and I think he would consider me a mentee although we never really established or consummated a deal. (AAM-D5)

These descriptions help quantify and therefore expand the scholarship of knowledge on the components of an effective cross-racial relationship to one in which: (a) the dominant group mentor is willing to mentor, (b) there is trust among the mentor and mentee as an essential component throughout the duration of the relationship, and (c) the mentor is willing to be educated in cultural sensitivity training before taking on a mentee.

Further, these statements expand the definition of a mentor in higher education as defined by Daloz (1999) and Harris (2002) to someone that is a visionary, who purposefully influences the student to think by challenging them, as well as, the people who surround them in their academic and social spheres. In addition the
following narratives describe in rich detail what positive mentors say and do in their interactions with students:

A good mentor in higher education is a person who knows a lot and willing to give, hopefully a lot of what you need. A conversation related to my doctoral program those things I wouldn’t talk to my parents or husband about. I know I will find sources of comfort and support for emotional problems and issues in many places perhaps—but we are talking about the connection of mentoring and the doctoral program. I would say that a mentor is someone who has some sense of a vision about how he or she can influence your way of seeing life. (HLF-C6)

Mentoring is unstructured but purposeful and that’s the dichotomy there. It’s unstructured because you don’t see your mentee once a week and you make yourself available as much as possible. But it is purposeful because the purpose is the mentoring. (HLM-A12)

My mentors never held my hand, they always ask, “did you think of this nor did you think of that—make a decision”. So they not only challenge me they have challenged others in my social and academic circles and they get other people to think. (AAM-D10)

**Finding Hidden Resources**

The participants described several support mechanisms which were not apparent in the previous studies, such as peer support, a determined attitude, and establishing an academic identity. Peers, other underrepresented students, and dominant group members proved to be very important as resources, trusted avenues for information, and allies against an unfamiliar and unwelcoming environment, as described in the following descriptions:

You keep trying to find out information from other students because it is only students who are telling me, “Maybe you should be looking for a committee right now.” (AAF-E7)
I have made networks with other graduate students and that has been very interesting because when you make these networks they share things with you so you don’t feel that you are on the outside looking in. (AAF-E13)

At this level I feel that the support of other students is essential. I think if I didn’t have friends that were in this program and other people that are going through these experiences, especially other students of color I wouldn’t have stuck with it. (AI-F10)

I think it is my colleagues that I am taking classes with, the other students I associate with we make some kind of system. We don’t know exactly everybody’s situation but there is enough commonality between us that we can just breathe and know there is a support system that is important. (AI-F16)

The participants also helped define practical information essential to success, including having a determined attitude and an academic identity, as illustrated below:

You do not get the Ph.D. for getting A’s in your classes or for being a good TA. You get it because of your networking skills, your ability to collaborate and cooperate and if seen as a positive role model to those around you and your ability to connect to those above and below. Your ability to get things done, your individualist ambitious aptitude and your ability to pick up things not written is what gets you through the program. (AAM-G4)

I think everybody that enters a doctoral program needs to establish their academic identity quickly. What I mean is they need to find a project, they need to find an approach, they need to define a paradigm, and they need to find who they are academically and quickly. (AAM-D13)

Research Question #3 Summary

In summary, this section on support mechanisms brings new meaning to this topic with the inclusion of the perspectives of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. Mentor relationships, specifically cross-racial
pairs now have inherent information to create successful matches. In addition, this study added a new dimension to support mechanisms in higher education with the inclusion of information on peer support and the practical recommendations not apparent to underrepresented doctoral students at the beginning of their programs. The next section addresses the bigger issue of the relevancy of these findings.

Researcher's Reflections: The Lessons Learned

Overwhelming, issues associated with race/ethnicity overshadowed every cultural and institutional barrier identified in the previous section. The pervasiveness of the intrusion on participants was described as tangible, overt, and covert, which is consistent with Luz Reyes and Halcon (1996). The question remains and is not fully addressed in the literature of what makes these students persist through every educational level—face the similar types of cultural, institutional, complex family and sociological issues, and racists’ viewpoints—unscathed and positive of their abilities? Then enroll in their doctoral programs and encounter major emotional difficulties? I returned to the four essential themes identified in the beginning of this chapter—the doctoral program, the people, the acculturation process and Whites have it better—and conducted a final analysis. As I reflected on these themes and their meaning to the lives of underrepresented doctoral students, one uniting phrase “change” illuminated the impact of these themes on the image of the participants.

The problems that participants discussed originated as they crossed the threshold of the “ivory towers” into the culture of academia, a society hidden from people outside of its realm. Many of the current policies and practices of doctoral
granting institutions were birthed more than 350 years ago (Boyer, 1990). This was also a time in American society when slavery was a practiced institution and only men walked the intellectual halls. Many things have changed within higher education, but much remains the same. This means that students of color and their complex issues were hidden from the scholarship and administrative practices of these great institutions.

One aspect of the doctoral program that has changed over the years is the reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree. The original doctoral recipients were wealthy and viewed their educational quests as an opportunity to build civic and religious character. These institutions were very prestigious and a Ph.D. recipient was considered an intellectual. In the nineteenth century there was a shift of focus from the shaping of lives into building the nation through research and invention. There was, however, an underlying assumption that a student had to be deemed worthy to receive a doctoral degree by successfully completing all of the matriculation and socialization phases. Moreover, through my observations at the different university settings and talking with administrators and faculty members, I found that this attitude is still inherently held. These participants had a more practical reason for getting a doctoral degree, which is to earn more money and have the opportunity of a leadership position. Their underlying assumption was if they made it through the selection process then successful graduation should be assured.

Even though the students who are pursuing Ph.D. degrees have changed over the years from males and predominately White to minorities and women, the standard curriculum and textbooks are based on the views of the dominant culture. The
dominant culture standard still prevails at most institutions, even at the HBCUs, in how classes are taught as well as in how research topics are selected and carried out. All students, regardless as to their enrollment in varying types of universities, still must contend with the rigors and demands of the "ivory tower". Thus, from the participants' standpoint they perceived nothing within the organizational structure of the doctoral granting institutions that reflected their diverse cultures. Consequently therefore the dominance of the White culture in the structure, curriculum as well as the sheer numbers of White people, transcended barriers into race/ethnic issues. This dichotomy that persists: approaches to education—curricula, textbooks, and research, etc.—remain the same and reflect the penchants of the dominant culture and yet, the population of doctoral students is growing more diverse and more varied. Moreover, this pressure of the unknown environment blinded them into internalizing their complex issues, emotions, and any factors that distinguished them from the dominant group and imposed on them an urgency to strip themselves of their natural defense mechanisms used to successfully navigate earlier levels of education. This forced acculturation impacted their identity, learning styles, confidence levels and transformed them into a new educated ethnic self.

Within the organizational structure of higher education this new ethnic individual becomes a unique dichotomy in the human dynamics cycle. To the dominant group this person resembles every other member of their ethnic minority and because of their educated status these individual are ideal faculty members and leaders. To the new underrepresented doctoral students this transformed ethnic leader looks like an ally in an unfamiliar environment. The reality is that this transformed leader has been
so far removed from their natural ethnic self for such as extended period of time that their acculturation has become permanent. Furthermore, activities that were common to members of their ethnic group and family have become foreign to them and now they find it difficult to enjoy socializing with their family members or ethnic peers. Unfortunately, the new underrepresented leader becomes a catalyst for ethnic tensions within the organizational structure because they cannot relate to students, which further alienates students away from their program of study. This theory would help to explain underrepresented doctoral attrition in HBCUs where the issue of race is replaced by the predominance of ethnic cultures.

This brings to close this section of findings based on the synergistic analysis of the surmised research from Chapter II, the research questions, and the perspectives of the participants. In a final blending of this information, the researcher reflected upon this data in “lessons learned”, and took the abstract and dated knowledge on African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos and American Indians and brought the inherent meaning of their lived experiences in higher education to the forefront. In the next section, I will address how this information can be used to advance the field of higher education.

How the Findings Can Inform Higher Education Practices

Gardner (1990) said the key to the release of human energy and talent is to remove obstacles to individual fulfillment. He explained this as a leader doing away with the inequalities imposed on some of our citizens by prejudice, poverty and other handicaps. Having knowledge of the people within an organization’s culture is central
to understanding and predicting behaviors, failures and successes (Owens, 2001).
Thus, for the leaders of doctoral granting institutions, these findings can inform
doctoral practices, increase the quality of diversity initiatives, and help dominant
group members understand African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian
students.

Elementary, high school, undergraduate, and community college administrators
can use this research to improve intervention and support mechanisms, strengthen the
infrastructure between the educational levels and increase opportunities for more
directed learning for underrepresented students. Also, program heads and recruitment
leaders can use the information to develop more meaningful workshops and events.
Even though sufficient financial support was needed for these students at every phase
of their programs, not understanding the system heightened the perceptions of racism,
alienation, and relationships with dominant group members. The findings of this
study can inform management practices in higher education and help dominant group
members understand the perspectives of underrepresented students. This information
can also assist other African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral
students find a reason for their lack of integration into higher education.

This information can also be effective for cultural competency training for all
ethnic group members within higher education, other levels of education, businesses
and other agencies. Especially relevant is the finding about the cultural transformed
individual. This will help leaders understand tensions among same-race/ethnic group
members, and their lack of ability to relate and mentor other members of their ethnic/
racial group. This information also leads to understanding the vulnerabilities of
leadership by these ethnic group members. Most importantly, leaders can use this information to make appropriate changes in enrollment practices, as well as, structure more effective measures to resolve conflict within organizations.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

In the course of completing this research project several limitations and questions surfaced concerning the phenomenon of underrepresented doctoral students in post-secondary institutions. It is important to remember that certain limitations exist when using phenomenology as a methodology. Schram (2003) explains that a person cannot understand a particular phenomenon without the knowledge that the study is based upon the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon. Readers who do not share the same perspective or experiences with the phenomena might struggle with the findings of this dissertation. However, in this case, this general limitation was minimized since the research was also an underrepresented doctoral student.

There were several limitations related to the size of this study. For example, the total number of participants was limited to 15 people representing African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian doctoral students. Because of the limited sample size, recommendations for future studies would be to study more students from these ethnicities in a regional or national focus. Similarly, other doctoral students (e.g., Asian, Pacific Islanders, White, gender and non-completers) may very well have had similar experiences at these same institutions and should be considered in future studies.
This study was instrumental in uncovering several styles of organizational behavior in higher education, such as the ways in which ethnic group members interact and communicate. A recommendation for future study would be to take the findings of this dissertation and mount an investigation on the impact of cultural competency levels on same-race or cross-cultural relationships in the advisor/student relationship. This exploration could provide new insights into the scholarship on educational outcomes on doctoral students, both underrepresented and dominant group. The suggested line of inquiry will help close the back door on attrition and open the front door to successful graduation for all students.

Summary

I started this research project with the intention of uncovering barriers within doctoral programs for underrepresented students in higher education. I will close this study with a tribute poem to my mentor in higher education, a person who positively changed the direction of my educational quests. Before I met this person I had similar experiences, frustrations and anxieties as the participants of this study:

I met a man, who said unto me,
I can see you do not have the key and
The door with the hidden knowledge has been closed.
I see you struggle with those who you think have the power to open the door.
But the power is locked within your soul.
So, allow me to pass the hidden torch unto you that was in turn passed unto me.

I will unveil the true knowledge that is passed from insiders to their own kind.
Because I see your potential and your passion for this cause and I see in you what I realized in myself many years ago.
So I sat at his feet and took in wisdom of the ages. He helped me understand the values of leaders,

And that a true leader values and treats every person with respect,
That every encounter is an opportunity, so be watchful.
He taught me how to lead in the midst of a large institution, and what is the moral and ethical way to act.
I learned first hand the scholarship of excellence and the life of a professorate in higher education.
I learned the deficits of the profession and the dynamics of the people within and that everyone has the potential for good and bad.
I learned to look at the positive instead of the ever-present darkness.
Most of all, I now have the ability to pass the torch and keys to others.
Appendix A1

HSIRB Approval Letter:
Western Michigan University
I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled *The Role of Mentoring in the Matriculation of Underrepresented Doctoral Students*. This research is intended to gain insight into the matriculation experiences of African-American, Latino/Latina, Native American, male and female doctoral students. This project is Nancy Greer-Williams’ dissertation report.

I will be asked to attend at least one, one-hour focus group session and at least one, 30-45 minute, in-depth interviews with the student investigator, Nancy Greer-Williams. I will be asked to meet the student investigator for the focus group sessions in the Merze Tate Center, third floor conference room in Sangren Hall. The focus group session will involve multiple respondents that have similar interests: underrepresented doctoral students willing to respond to questions regarding support/mentoring/expectations/disappointments in my doctoral education. I may also be asked general information about myself, such as level of education, my immediate family’s educational level, and employment status. The in-depth interviews will involve private discussions of questions raised from the focus group sessions.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name, organization I work for, or the university that I attend will not appear on any reports or papers. My identity shall remain confidential throughout the length of this project. I can opt to either use my first name only or an alias. All material shall be written in such a way that individual subjects, including mentors, will not be described or identified by statements and/or comments made during interviews. In addition, my responses will be audio taped, transcribed, and later reviewed by the principal and student investigator of this project. The audiotapes and written transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigators possession and at no time be handled by anyone other than the investigators of this study. All materials will be retained for at least three years (as required by the university policy) in a locked cabinet and subsequently destroyed. In short, at no time will any of my responses be linked to me personally, instead my comments will be attributed generally to underrepresented doctoral students.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. However for participant’s protection, all data collected from focus groups and personal interviews will be written up in such a way that individual subjects cannot be identified by what they say. The final publication will be written in such a way that removes any identifiers to myself, the university or organization I work for. I may be upset by the content of the interview, and can terminate the interview at any time. If I need counseling about this topic, I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to pursue it. If an accidental injury
occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is by having the chance to talk about my matriculation experiences, which research indicates is beneficial. In addition, other underrepresented doctoral students who experience difficulties in matriculation may benefit from knowledge that is gained from this research.

I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study or want a final copy of this paper, I may contact Dr. Van Cooley, (269) 387-3882 or Nancy Greer-Williams, (269) 387-6181. I may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the vice president for research at 387-8298 with any concerns that I have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner.

Do not participate if the stamped date is more than one year old.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of this study and that I agree to participate.

______________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                      Date

All information discussed in the focus groups is confidential and I will not discuss the contents or information regarding other participants or organizations outside the confines of the focus group.

______________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                      Date

Consent Obtained by ______________________________
Researcher Initials                          Date
Appendix A2

HSIRB Approval Letter:
Howard University
HOWARD UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 29, 2004

Pat Cole Holiday, Ph.D., Director
Mentoring and Professional Development
Retention, Mentoring and Support Program
Graduate School
Howard University
Washington, DC 20059

RE: IRB-01-GSAS-08 “The Role of Mentoring in the
Matriculation of Underrepresented Doctoral Students.”

Dear Doctor Holiday:

Receipt is acknowledged of the above-referenced protocol. It was approved and will expire March 28, 2005. The HU IRB Federal Wide Assurance number is FWA00000891.

Please be advised that in accordance with Federal and University policies, all informed consent documents are to be kept on record with this project and should be achieved by you for at least three (3) years after the date of the last IRB approval. The enclosed IRB date-stamped consent form should be used when obtaining informed consent. All other versions of the consent form should be destroyed. In the event that any changes are made in the protocol, including personnel changes, they are to be approved by the Board prior to their initiation.

Should you anticipate renewing this protocol annually, a status report is to be submitted to the Board 90 days prior to the expiration date. If not, a close-out report is to be submitted to the Board within 90 days after the completion of this study. The Status Report Form can be downloaded from the HUIRB web site.
The Board wishes you and Ms. Nancy Greer-Williams every success in your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

Warren K. Ashe, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary

cc: Orlando L. Taylor, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate School

Dr. Van Cooley
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Ms. Nancy Greer-Williams
1215 Wells Place, Kalamazoo, MI 490001
grrwllms@charter.net

Enclosure

WKA/dkc
Appendix B

Consent Document
Date: January 8, 2004

To: Van Cooley, Principal Investigator
   Nancy Greer-Williams, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 03-12-06

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Role of Mentoring in the Matriculation of Underrepresented Doctoral Students" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

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

Approval Termination: January 8, 2005
Initial Focus Group Discovery Session

Q: What is your perception of a supportive environment?

Q: What does it take to get an underrepresented doctoral student to complete at this university?

Q: So you do not feel that there is anything internally set up for success at this university to help underrepresented students complete?

Q: How many people in your immediate family have experiences this level of education?

Q: Was there anyone person that helped you make the decision for the PhD program?

Q: What does being mentored mean to you?

Q: Have you had a mentor relationship like you described?

Q: Classify you interpretation of the mentorship relationship as it stands at this school between underrepresented doctoral students and faculty staff?

Q: So do you see race as a challenge to the mentoring relationship at this school?

Q: What was not helpful to you in your matriculations experiences at this institution? What are some of the gaps in the system where it did not work for you?
Initial Focus Group Discovery Session

Q: Do you feel that it was based on you being an underrepresented student?

Q: Why do you think attrition is at alarmingly high levels in the underrepresented community?

Q: Statement it is easier to attrite?
Appendix D

Second Interview Guide
Questions for Participants
Barriers to Completion for Underrepresented Doctoral Students

1. Talk about your transition into doctoral education.

2. Did your experiences in K-12, Undergrad, prepare your for a PhD?

3. Did you go into graduate school directly from undergrad?

4. From high school did you go directly into a 4-year college or university?

5. Did you encounter any issues in your program in your doctoral programs that can be traced to culture? Or a lack of understanding your culture?

6. How would you as a __________ explain it to a non-member of your culture?

7. Did you encounter any issues in your program that can be traced to the structure, program or institution?

8. How would you explain this barrier to a non-member of your race/ethnicity?

9. What are the key types of supports, which you as a student feel will benefit you and others of your ethnicity to successfully complete a doctoral program?

10. Do you feel that racism or any “ism” exists in your program?

11. Explain how and what way.
REFERENCES

Adams v. Richardson, 351 F.2d 636 (1972).


Bakke v. Regents of University of California, 18 Cal. (1976).


Harris, S. M. (2002). Student perceptions of the mentoring relationships in higher education. In F. Kochan (Ed.), The organizational and human dimensions of successful mentoring programs and relationships (pp. 53-68). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.


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Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).


