AN EXAMINATION OF ATTRITION FACTORS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED

MINORITY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: PHENOMENOLOGICAL

PERSPECTIVES OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

M. Gail Augustine

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Margaret E. Adamek, Ph. D., Chair

_____

Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Ph. D.

Doctoral Committee   _____

Khadija Khaja, Ph. D.

June 18, 2015   _____

Kathleen S. Grove, J. D.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, J. Chris, and my two daughters, Mesie, and Shaunalee. They are my biggest cheerleaders. Without their support and reassurance completing this process would not be possible. I only hope I have made them as proud as they make me each day.

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PERSPECTIVES OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

More than half of the 400,000 freshmen minority students enrolled each year in colleges and universities in the United States fail to graduate within six years and some not at all. Many barriers impact student retention in college, especially for underrepresented undergraduate minority students. Studies in the past have focused on the causes of attrition of underrepresented undergraduate minority students, revealing a significant gap in the research on what leads to their success in higher education. A phenomenological study was used to allow participants to share their experiences from their individual perspectives. This qualitative research study investigated the social psychological attrition barriers encountered by successful undergraduate underrepresented minority students from African American and Latino groups. Exploring the perspective of successful students deepened the understanding of the barriers that minority students face in higher education, how they addressed these barriers, and what helped them to successfully graduate. Through in-depth interviews, this study explored the perceived barriers to student success encountered by successful undergraduate underrepresented minority students in a PWI. Participants' strategies for success was be examined and discussed.

Keywords: attrition, retention, barriers, phenomenology, underrepresented, minority

Margaret E. Adamek, Ph.D.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The gaps that separate Latino and African American students from their White counterparts are wider today than they have been since 1975 (Engle & Lynch, 2009). In 2010 President Obama launched a nationwide initiative to increase the number of educated adults in the United States, zeroing on those from fast-growing minority groups. The aim of the initiative is to increase college completion rates from 40% to 60% by 2020 (Lynch & Engle, 2010). The emphasis on minority students stems from ever-growing research evidence highlighting a steady increase in this population (Fry, 2009, 2010; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Syed & Azmitia, 2011; Thomas, 2010). Unfortunately, as minority students seek higher education, many are worn down by the multiple barriers that impede their completion and many fail to graduate.

More than half of the 400,000 freshmen minority students who enroll each year in colleges and universities in the United States do not graduate within six years (Engle & Theokas, 2010)--some not at all. This population of minority students is diverse and includes Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans. While the graduation rate for six years after college enrollment is 67% for Asian Americans and 60% for Caucasians, it is just 40% for African Americans, 49% for Hispanics, and 38% for Native Americans (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010). Within a four year period the graduation rate for both African Americans (21.0%) and Latino (25.8%) undergraduates are twice less likely that of their Caucasian counterparts (42.6 %) and of Asians (44.9%) (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor & Tran, 2011).

Currently, the college dropout rate is 29.2% for Hispanics and 30.1% for African Americans and this noticeably exceeds that of their Caucasian counterparts (18.8 %) and is twice that of Asians (14.9%) (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). Yet, the specific barriers impeding undergraduate minority students' completion rates are unclear when common minority factors (such as family background, economic status, achievement level, preparedness, first generation, access to finances) remain constant.

The exploration of this phenomenon is not new. The challenges which lead to low graduation and high attrition rates of minority students in higher education are some of the most studied educational problems by policy makers and scholars in the United States (Adelman, 2006; Allensworth, 2006; Engle & Lynch, 2009; Fischer, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Seidman, 2006; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1984, 1988, 1993,1997, 1998,1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007). These scholars have identified several barriers experienced by minority students in higher education that include lack of college preparedness, lack of academic integration, low socio-economic status, and being a first-generation college student.

Most of the attempts to increase graduation rates and to decrease attrition rates of minority college students have focused on two main barriers: 1) academic under-preparedness and 2) low socio-economic status. Other researchers have added cultural differences, poor faculty-student relationships, linguistic barriers, lack of mentorships, alienation, lack of social integration, misidentification, and poor social connectedness as factors affecting minority attrition and graduation success (e.g. Guiffrida, 2006; Ogbu, 1978, 1987, 1994; Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

Another school of thought, which has been sparsely used to address the problem of undergraduate underrepresented minority attrition in higher education, is a social work perspective. Historically, social workers have intervened at the pre-secondary educational levels, addressing multiple risk factors connected with truancy and academic failure (Dupper, 2003; Tyack, 1992). While numerous studies have substantiated the effectiveness of social workers' involvement in education on the primary and secondary school levels, there is much less attention and focus at the higher education level (e.g., Allen-Meares, 2004; Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2006; Massat, Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2009). However, sparse studies to date have investigated the role and effectiveness of social work interventions in higher education attrition factors (Vonk, Markward, & Arnold, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Attrition rates are the highest among minority students, and within the last decade research has shown an alarmingly high rate of attrition among Latino undergraduate students. Approximately half of the students entering college in the United States fail to complete an undergraduate degree within six years (Bound & Turner, 2011). The growing phenomenon of attrition among minority populations continues to draw nationwide attention of government officials, policy makers, and university administrators, among others. Engstrom and Tinto (2008) reported that only 26% of low-income college students, who are primarily from underrepresented minority groups, earn a college degree in four years while 56 % of White students will do so in four years of matriculation.

Engstrom and Tinto concurred that college is a revolving door for low-income students, inferring that access to college alone without support does not equate to success. Other studies have suggested that gender disparities contribute to attrition. Among underrepresented undergraduate minorities, Ross et al. (2012) found that attrition rates are highest in African American males, while Pidcock, Fischer, and Munsch (2001) reported that female Latino college students have the highest attrition rates. Harper (2006) reported an attrition rate of 67.6 % for African American males, the highest attrition rates among all other ethnic/racial minority groups. Also, two-thirds of African Americans did not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both male and female in higher education (Harper, 2012).

Although there are variations in the literature regarding the highest attrition rates by gender, the general consensus is that the characteristics of the student populations that are failing in American's higher education are within the underrepresented minority group. Underrepresented minority college students have historically experienced the most barriers to success in higher education (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006; Lumina Foundation, 2006; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 2003), making attrition rates highest among this population. In fact, underrepresented minority college students have the lowest graduation rate compared to any other college students (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Cook & Cordova, 2006; Walpole, 2007). The significance of this occurrence affects every fiber of society specifically in areas of economic and financial factors.

Significance of the Problem

The significance of attrition is manifested in several aspects (e.g., economic hardship, defaulted student loans). A major impact from attrition is the financial burden resulting from unpaid student loans. According to Casselman (2012), students who drop out of college before completion are four times more likely to default on their student loans than those who complete college. For example, in a 2011 study, the Institute for Higher Education Policy found that 58% of the 1.8 million students whose student loan repayment is due in 2005 had not obtained an undergraduate degree (Casselman, 2012). Of all the students who did not complete their undergraduate degree, 59% were delinquent on their student loans or had defaulted, while only 38% of the college students who completed their undergraduate degree were delinquent on their student loan (Casselman, 2012). The connection between attrition and loan delinquency leads to further economic and financial deprivation of an already disenfranchised population.

Therefore, when college students drop out, it not only weighs heavily on their personal or familial assets but also costs the country significant financial and human capital burdens. Hooker and Brand (2009) contended that if the United States narrowed the disparities in educational achievement between high-and low-income students and between majority and ethnic minority students, the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would increase by at least $400 billion. The consequences of college attrition extend beyond the students' and institutions' failed expectations. In response to the disparity in college completion among groups in the United States, Engle and Lynch (2009) asserted:

> Increasing education levels and closing longstanding gaps between groups isn't just important to our economic competitiveness. It also contributes to

other things we hold dear as a nation, including democratic participation, social cohesion, strong families, and healthy behavior. America cannot afford to fail to develop the talents of young people from low-income and minority families. It's not good for our economy. And it's not good for our democracy. (p. 3)

Higher education institutions are not static environments. Consequently, with demographic growth and the increasing diversity of ethnic minority students in higher education institutions, the problem of attrition is more evident. Ortiz and Santos (2009) expressed concerns for the complexity by which higher education institutions are challenged in the 21st century. The phenomenon of attrition has persisted over decades, taking a place in the history of higher education literature without a full understanding of the underlying factors contributing to attrition. Even with analyses of numerous empirical studies on attrition spanning across national, state, and institutional levels and drawing upon longitudinal and cross-sectional data, the problem remains and has even increased among underrepresented minority students. Thus, years of quantitative studies have not fully explained the reasons for attrition. Perhaps the approaches used to look at this problem need to be qualitatively revisited.

In this sense, Braxton and Hirschy (2005) warned that attrition typifies an ill-structured phenomenon; as such, a resolution cannot be formed by a single solution. Past studies have used properties of Tinto's milestone theoretical model to examine attrition; however, some researchers (e.g., Swail et al., 2003; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992), including Tinto have acknowledged that the use of his model alone cannot resolve this phenomenon among underrepresented minorities. Therefore, quantitative approaches of the last 40 years used to study undergraduates' attrition cannot be used to study the underrepresented minority student population in its entirety.

To understand the complexity and to examine how attrition influences underrepresented minorities and their higher education experiences, a phenomenological approach is necessary.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Review of Theories

As institutions and studies responded to minority attrition, many theories have been used to frame and to explore the phenomenon. Institutions of higher education have been struggling for years with the complex challenge of helping minority students succeed and graduate (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Schneider & Lin, 2011; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 2006). Researchers studying minority students' retention have found that the problem of attrition is more prevalent on predominantly white campuses than on other campuses (Cabrera et al., 1999; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2007). These researchers reported that minority students find the campus environment to be "hostile and unsupportive of their social and cultural needs" (Holmes et al., 2007, p. 80). Other studies recognized that minority students have difficulty developing interpersonal relationships with faculty and lack social interaction in the campus community. In fact, social isolation, alienation, and lack of congruencies between student and institution have also been noted as contributing to the negative experiences of minority students on predominantly white campuses (Holmes et al., 2007; Loo & Rolison, 1986). Although some researchers have found that social isolation factors contribute to underrepresented undergraduate minority self-perception and ultimately influence attrition, it remains unclear why not all underrepresented undergraduate minority students are similarly affected in such collegiate settings.

As such, there is a need to understand whether social psychological factors impede underrepresented minority students' social psychological well-being, leading to attrition in some collegiate settings.

Thus, various theories have been used to study the reasons for and patterns of attrition barriers that impede minority students in higher education. A brief presentation follows on the theoretical perspectives from previous research used to guide the inquiry on minority attrition barriers, namely: 1) Astin's Student Involvement, 2) Social Comparison: Reference Group, 3) Steele's Theory of Academic Identification, and 4) Self-Determination Theory.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory posits that a greater degree of student involvement academically and socially in the college milieu will yield learning (Astin, 1982, 1984, 1993, 1999). This theory was developed from a longitudinal study involving 309 different higher education institutions with a sample size of 24,847 students and examined the ways institutional characteristics influence undergraduate student development. Astin's theory asserts, "the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (p. 518). Astin defined involvement as devoting a considerable amount of energy on academics, participating in student organizations, interacting with peers, and frequently interacting with faculty. Also, Astin referred to expended energy as the quantity of physical and psychological drive that students allocated to academic experiences. As such, this theory asserts that a highly motivated student is more likely to be successful than a non-motivated student, as

a result of investing a considerable amount of energy in his or her academics, as well as in the social aspects of collegiate life. Therefore, according to Astin, the greater a student's involvement in the college experience, the more engaged and motivated a student. This results not only in retention but also in participation in an increased number of activities, thus further enriching the college experience (See figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Five Basic Principles of Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy, which can be   generalized (e.g. the student experience) or specific (e.g. preparing for a social work statistic test);

2. Involvement occurs along a continuum that is different for each student at any given time;

3. Involvement has both qualitative and quantitative aspects;

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program are directly influenced by the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program; and

5. The effectiveness of educational policy/practice is directly related to its capacity to increase student involvement.

Therefore, according to Astin's Student Involvement Theory, successful college students are those who actively pursue opportunities for involvement within collegiate settings. Astin's theory was intended "to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affected the student's persistence in college" (Astin, 1984, p. 302).

As such, it is during this continuum of involvement that students invest physical and psychological energy. Although the institution must provide opportunities for student involvement, it is the students who determine their level of investment in those opportunities. As such, this theory posits that both the students and the institution play critical roles in the student's success. Several studies have endorsed the premise of Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory that increased student involvement is associated with academic persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Social Comparison: Reference Group Theory

While Astin's Theory underscores the importance of student involvement academically and socially in the college milieu, the Reference Group theory acknowledges the importance of social comparison in the learning environment (e.g., Goldstein, 2003; Horvat & Lewis, 2003). The support and encouragement that minority students receive from significant or influential others is important for their self-evaluation to complete academic goals. Festinger (1954) discussed his theory of the social comparison process, better known as reference group theory. Festinger recognized, "there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities . . . to the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison respectively with the opinions and abilities of others" (p. 117). Schroder and Hurst (1996) stated that an interactive environment places at risk certain values such as self-esteem, approval of others, and existing self-concept. Thus, according to reference group theory, students are motivated to have an accurate assessment of their competence level within their groups or classes. Reference group theory defined two distinct dimensions: normative reference group, which describes a

group in which individuals are motivated to expand or sustain acceptance; and

comparative reference group, which describes a group which individuals use as a point of

reference in making evaluations of themselves and of groups (Antonio, 2004; Marsh &

Hau, 2003; Marshall & Weinstein, 1984).

Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1982) referred to reference group as the affiliation

which individuals place on the social and cultural groups to which they belong, and this

identification provides a frame of reference. For instance, when students are learning

new material in a difficult course, it is reasonable to believe that they may have

reservations about asking questions, fearing that they might appear "stupid" or incredibly

misinformed regarding some concept. This apprehension about asking questions may

inhibit the learning process for some students. In particular, minority students are not

likely to ask questions in class for fear of being perceived as stupid. Aronson, Fried, and

Good (2002) inferred that this academic fear is linked to the psychological factor referred

to as "stereotype threat" (p. 114). Therefore, students benefit from a reference group of

similar peers to thrive positively in the learning environment, which would help them to

realize that they are not alone in finding the course material difficult.

Minority students who do not have such a reference group of peers lack a

supportive peer-exchange when faced with difficult course material. This may lead them

to negative self-evaluations, experiencing feelings of isolation, and, subsequently, poor

academic outcomes, leading to attrition. Minority students are not likely to attribute the

challenges they experience to the inherent difficulty of the course material or course

content, but are more prone to perceive that the problem is a result of their lack of

intellectual capacity. Aronson et al. (2002) cited several studies that referred to the social

psychological dilemma, which has its roots in the prevailing American image of minorities as intellectually inferior (Aronson & Salinas, 1997; Aronson et al., 1999; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This stereotypical threat to African American and Hispanic students negatively impacts their academic performance when they are challenged in higher education. As such, minority students are more prone to develop negative perceptions of their self-concept, which, without positive and similar reference groups, increases their chances of attrition.

Antonio (2004) stated that reference group theory is similar to the fish-pond effect, which implies that self-appraisal is based on an individual's relative position in comparison to others. He alluded to the fish-pond effect as an individual's metaphorical identification with big fish in a small pond or a small fish in a big pond. Antonio (2004) concluded that it is better to be a big fish in a small pond. Students who have a large frame of reference to similar peer groups within the campus environment are more likely to have a better social and ultimately academic experience in college. Underrepresented minority students who are usually in the minority at predominantly white universities do not have a large frame of reference.

In explaining the significance of reference groups in regards to underrepresented minority college students, it is necessary to examine the impact of academic self-concept within the social and cultural context. Antonio (2004) proposed that a reference group's influence in the campus environment on a student's evaluation of his or her abilities, competencies, and potential is important. Antonio also argued that subculture groups have a critical influence on a student's intellectual confidence and educational aspirations in colleges.

However, when underrepresented minority students do not have a reference group's approval or validation, their evaluation of self is diminished, leading to attrition. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated, "What happens to students after they arrive on campus has a greater influence on academic and social self-concepts than does the kind of institution students attend" (p. 184). More specifically, to interact academically or socially in higher education without a reference group, minority students can feel isolated and alienated in the collegiate community. Wiseman, Emry, and Morgan (1988) contended that the problem of academic uncertainty is aggravated for students as a result of a lack of social models. In particular, this uncertainty undermines minority students' motivation and self-concept. Alienation is more likely to be reflected when there is reduced knowledge, which further imbues self-criticism and anxiety. Thus, social estrangement or alienation will ultimately lead underrepresented minority students to feel a sense of misidentification in the academic domain.

Steele's Theory of Academic Identification

Steele's (1997) theory of domain identification is used to describe achievement barriers still faced by African Americans and other minorities in collegiate settings (Aronson, 2004; Gonzales, Blanton & Williams, 2002; McKay, Doverspike, Bowen-Hilton, & Martin, 2002; Osborne & Walker, 2006, Osborne, 2006- 2007; Schmader & Johns, 2003). The theory assumes that in order to sustain college success, an individual must identify with academic achievement in the sense of it becoming a part of their self-definition. The expansion of Steele's theory provides an explanation for the frustration associated with negative stereotypes imposed on minority groups' identification in academic domains as a result of historical and societal pressures. Steele (1997) defined

academic misidentification as a threat to an individual academic domain, which is usually

influenced by psychosocial and intellectual factors. The assumption is that minority

students are subjected to threats centered on the socioeconomic disadvantages and sparse

educational access that has been imposed on them because of inadequate resources, few

role models, and pre-college preparation disadvantages. Some researchers have

identified a psychological factor that may help explain the failure or underachievement of

otherwise capable undergraduate minority students, known as "stereotype threat"

(Aronson, 2002; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Steele, 1999). Steele (1997) referred to

stereotype threat as the factors contributing to the difficulties and challenges for minority

college students to identify with academic domains. In particular, Aronson (2002)

contended that stereotype threats occur in circumstances "where a stereotype about a

group's intellectual abilities is relevant--taking an intellectually challenging test, being

called upon to speak in class, and so on" (p. 114). Indeed, underrepresented minority

students experience physiological and intellectual burdens not endured by other students

to whom specific stereotypes are not applicable. Consequently, Aronson posited that

minority students experience disconcerting anxiety regarding the likelihood of fulfilling

stereotypical negative racial inferiority. In a study of how stereotypes shape an

individual's intellectual identity and performance, Steele (1997) described the

psychosocial threat that surfaces in a situation when a negative stereotypical response is

triggered toward one's group.

        In general, individuals engaged in behaviors that place them at risk of confirming

a negative stereotype are likely to experience psychological distress and pressure.

Through this psychological process, a stereotype damages minority students'

performances in a domain such as academics (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The effects of stereotype threat can have serious ramifications on a student's evaluation

of intellectual ability, which in turn can lead to negative academic outcomes.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is one of the most cited and endorsed theories for

explaining how socio-cultural factors characterize individuals' inherent psychological

desires to shape their actions (Reeve, 2002). This theory implies that an individual's

motivation to perform academically is based on two motivational factors: 1) intrinsic

motivation and 2) extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1991). The main premise of Self-

Determination Theory is that motivation for or self-actualization of intrinsic needs is

especially required for self-development and learning, more so than extrinsic

accomplishments. Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, and Pugh (2011) articulated that

motivation equates to self-determination, and, in particular, intrinsic motivation is the

most self-deterministic. A student's self-autonomy is a critical factor in the collegiate

setting. Thus, Reeve, Deci, and Ryan (2004) contended that the most significant and

successful learning transpires when students are motivated intrinsically. Hence, the Self-

Determination Theory is a theoretical framework that provides a basis for framing and

filtering social psychological barriers, which are relevant for explaining why some

underrepresented minority college students persist while others drop out.

Although theories and models have been used in the literature interchangeably, it

is necessary to make the distinction between a theory and a model.

Payne (2005) summarizes that a theory provides an explanation and a model describes approaches to a phenomenon. For example, student departure theories provide an explanation of why students attrite from higher education institutions, while models describe practices and help to structure approaches to attrition.

Two models will be explored in the following section: Tinto's social integration model, which is based on Tinto's (1975) original theory of student departure and Bean and Eaton's (2001) psychological model, which is based on Bean's (1980) original theoretical work.

<div align="center">**Models**</div>

<div align="center">**Social Integration Model**</div>

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

While the aforementioned social psychological theories underscore the importance of student involvement, social comparison, stereotype threat, and self-determination academically and socially in the college milieu, Tinto's model acknowledges the importance of student attributes, such as pre-college experience (Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The major premise of Tinto's model is that academic and social integration[1] are important for college students to persist and succeed. Concurring with Astin (1978), Tinto emphasizes student integration as a key factor to student persistence in the collegiate environment. Tinto (1993) further specifies two dimensions of importance: the individual dimension and the institutional dimension. The individual dimension involves the student's intentions toward academic and career goals and commitment; thus, individual motivation and effort are critical.

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[1] Tinto (1993) refers to academic integration as students' intellectual life within the institution, while social integration refers to students' social relationships with peers and faculty within the collegiate environment.

The institutional dimension involves the student's ability to adjust to academic and social systems or incongruence (Tinto, 1988). Moreover, Astin's theory specifies interactions with academics and with faculty or peers, whereas Tinto purports that college student's levels of commitment to both the institution and to their goals hinge on their social and academic integration.

Tinto's Model: The Importance of Academic and Social Integration

The suitability of Tinto's model has been criticized by several researchers on the premise that this model neglects to consider minority students' cultural context within the collegiate setting (Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh, 2005; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999). However, numerous studies that examine attrition in higher education have cited properties of Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of institutional departure (e.g. Fischer, 2007; Kuh, 2003; Ogden, Thompson, Russell, & Simons, 2003; Pascarella, 1985; Van Lanen & Lockie, 1997). Over 777 studies reference Tinto's work, making this model one of the most common theoretical frameworks which has been used for almost two decades to examine higher education retention and attrition (Seidman, 2005). More specifically, Tinto's original model hinges on Van Gennep's (1960) explanation of Rites of Passage that transition (integration) happens in three stages: separation, segregation, and incorporation.

Tinto's model is based on three developmental or progressive stages. First, the separation stage refers to the students' departure from previous social networks and associations. Tinto contended that students must depart from their previous communities and integrate in the learning community to persist (Swail et al., 2003).

At this stage, students must leave their previous communities and fully weave into the fiber of the college community. The secondary stage is the transition when the students experience stress and levels of discomfort as they strive to cope with the absence of familiar social ties and past associates. The expectation is that during this process or transition students integrate into the new college community. Tinto stated that during the incorporation stage, the third stage, students are transformed and no longer see "self" as his/her prior "self" but as a new individual (Swail et al., 2003) being integrated as part of the college milieu. This model suggests that students must be fully integrated into the academic and social community of higher education; students must separate themselves from past associations and traditions (Guiffrida, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

The fact that minority students at predominantly white campuses express feelings of isolation and alienation (Espenshade & Radford, 2009; Guiffrida, 2005) can be explained because of lack of social integration. Tinto's (1999) model underscores social integration as an important attribute of student interaction and mutual support for student learning. In contrast, Guiffrida (2005) argued that while Tinto's model is appropriate for the developmental progression of White students, it fails to be applicable to minority students.

In concurrence with Tinto's (1993) model of social integration, Kuh (2001) posited that students must be embedded in the campus community to enhance persistence. In contrast, Kuh and Love (2000) later asserted that students of subculture groups who felt alienated could depart from the university prematurely as a result of being unable to become a part of the dominant campus culture. Kuh and Love referenced Attinasi (1989) and Tierney (1992), who disputed that students from the subculture may

find themselves having to compromise their cultural/racial community in order to "fit in" to the dominant culture of the campus community. In addition, Swail et al. (2003) referenced several researchers who argued that Tinto's model is tremendously limited in its application to minority students (Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992). They claimed that it was an unrealistic expectation to perceive that minority students would disassociate from their culture, belief system, and familial support to become integrated in the campus community.

Numerous studies pointed out that Tinto's model lacked cultural sensitivity or recognition of minority students' requirement to keep strong ties with their social and cultural traditions for successful college completion (Cabrera et al., 1999; Delgado, 2002; Gloria, Robinson-Kurpuis, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2006; Hendricks, 1996; Hurtado, 1997; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Nora, 2002; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, &Trevino, 1997). Thus, while Tinto's model presents a more perceptive explanation than other models, it remains insufficient to explain the context of social psychological barriers, which intersect minority students' success in the college community. Perhaps, as implied by some critics (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005, 2006; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992), Tinto's model does not address how social psychological barriers can impede the capacity for minority students to become socially integrated in the collegiate setting.

Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model

Several researchers revised Tinto's model (e.g., Bean, 1982; 1986; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Bean & Eaton, 2000), incorporating important features of Tinto's academic and social integration model to construct a psychological model. Bean's (1980, 1983) original work emerged from empirical and theoretical studies by incorporating principles of background, organizational, environmental, attitudinal, and outcome variables to understand the psychological process of attrition. Bean (1990) later posited an explanatory model as a further explanation of his previous model on student retention. Eaton and Bean (1995) expanded Bean's model, giving importance to students' characteristics as an important factor for integration. More recently, Bean and Eaton (2000) purported that academic and social process of retention is a result of psychological processes. While Tinto's model describes students' departure, Bean and Eaton psychological model postulate retention (Roberts, 2012). Evolving over three decades, Bean's model of turnover of organizations progressed to a psychologically based model, which correlates retention with former behavior, normative values, attitudes, and intentions. Bean and Eaton's model demonstrates a psychosomatic process or self-assessment which college students engage in during their matriculation as preclusion for retention.

This model proposed college student's psychological process is at the core of academic and social integration in the collegiate setting.

Figure 1. Four Psychological Theories Incorporated in the Bean and Eaton Model:

1.   Attitude-behavior theory
2.   Attribution theory, in which an individual has resiliency to deal with internal locus of control
3.   Coping behavioral theory, the ability to evaluate and acclimatize to a new environment
4.   Self-efficacy theory, an individual's self-perception as competence for dealing with specific responsibilities or situations (Bean & Eaton, 2001).

Bean and Eaton claimed that college students consistently engage in a psychological process with faculty, college administrators, peers, and others within and external to the collegiate settings. Bean and Eaton noted that "adaptation, as measured by social and academic integration, should be an attitudinal reflection of a student's intention to stay or leave the institution . . . ultimately linked to the student's actual persistence or departure" (p. 620). Bean and Eaton (2000) concurred that students who persist are more likely to have effective interaction in the collegiate setting which strengthens their self-efficacy. Accordingly, Bean and Eaton (2000) concurred that student persistence in higher education is psychologically motivated. In fact, a close association is indicative that students' attitude to college would greatly influence their intention to persist or drop out (Bean, 1986; Eaton & Bean, 1995). For example, Fischer (2007) referenced Bean's (1980, 1983) original model in explaining the importance of interaction between students' attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Swail et al. (2003) confirmed that behavior intention is a critical factor in the process of retention.

In examining the key factors that affect minority students while accessing a college education, it would be helpful to identify which component of this model is likely to be employed to enhance retention. Although both Tinto's and Bean's models discussed academic integration, this variable is demonstrative as a different role in the individual models. Mainly, Tinto theorized that academic performance results in academic integration; on the other hand, Bean contended that good grades are an outcome of academic integration. Similar to Tinto's sociological model and Bean and Eaton's, psychological models have been employed to examine and to analyze the uniqueness of students' college experiences.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

In quantitative studies, conceptual frameworks are formed from theoretical models; however, in this study, a synthesis of theories and models will be used to guide the inquiry (acknowledged as the researcher's preconception of the phenomenon). A synthesis of the theories and models will form a framework for consideration of the social psychological barriers that impede underrepresented minority students in higher education. The framework will employ an approach to explore the social psychological barriers that underrepresented minority students encountered in selected Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). In addition, the exploration will compare and determine what is necessary for students to overcome social psychological barriers. To understand the dynamics of psychological factors, Self-determination theory will be used because it will highlight how psychological barriers may intercept retention and attrition. Hence, this theory will help to provide an agenda of psychological barriers relevant for exploring

how self-perception and motivation variables influence the persistence of underrepresented minority students in college.

Components of Involvement theory and the Social Integration Model have been established by several studies as important factors for college success. However, critiques of the Social Integration Model contend that this model cannot be applied to minority students' college experiences (Guiffida, 2005; Rendon et al., 2000) because it is unrealistic to expect minority students to abandon their cultural backgrounds to become socially integrated in the collegiate environment (Braxton et al., 2004). The reference group concept appears to support Tinto's social integration model, which states that students' integration in the college environment replaces their ties with their previous communities. Tinto's Model highlights that it is this integration that provides students with a stronger tie to campus life and ultimately provides a successful college experience. Antonio (2004), concurring with Tinto (1975), claimed that several studies support the notion that students' similar peer groups on campus act as reference groups (Astin, 1977, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991 as cited in Antonio, 2004). This notion assumes that reference groups can serve as a proxy for the absence of family and relatives. However, not much exploration has been carried out to examine whether underrepresented minority students on PWIs are able to form reference groups. In this sense, researchers fail to consider that minority students, without having the presence of similar peers in collegiate settings, are not able to form reference groups.

According to this rationale, one cannot deny that underrepresented minority students are challenged psychologically when navigating public higher education institutions. However, one cannot refute that integration is relevant for college success.

The literature has established factors that contribute for underrepresented minority students' lack of social integration to be embedded in historical and social stereotypical factors. Therefore, Steele's theory will serve to inform the framework for understanding how underrepresented minority students' perceptions of these factors mediate integration, motivation, and involvement. Steele's theory will provide a more informed explanation to illustrate how alienation and social estrangement are more likely to be manifested in the absence of understanding the stated factors that further permeates social psychological barriers.

Bean and Eaton's model represents a paradigmatic shift from Tinto's model: Bean and Eaton's model focused on a psychological perspective and Tinto's focused on a sociological perspective. However, most studies using properties of Tinto's model focused on students' academic and social inputs as the criteria for determining persistence or attrition. In fact, Tinto's model has been used extensively as an explanation for college retention and attrition. While insightful with its focus, Tinto's model does not provide an explanation for the campus experience in regards to underrepresented minority students' ability or inability to overcome barriers in the collegiate environment (Padilla, 1999; Padilla et al., 1997). In this sense, Tinto's model explains effectively the importance of social and academic integration. Yet, it fails to examine the psychological and other factors that underrepresented minority undergraduates exercise to overcome barriers in higher education. Thus, Bean and Eaton's Model will be employed in the structure of this study to identify, characterize, and understand the psychosomatic processes of underrepresented undergraduate minority students in their collegiate experiences.

Synthesis of Theoretical Models and Review of Literature

To address attrition, Bean and Eaton's model hypothesizes that the college student psychological process must have a fit or match to the institution. Students' positive psychological interface with the institution enhances their commitment and persistence toward degree completion. Accordingly, students' college persistence hinges on positive attitudes and beliefs, which are largely, influenced both by internal and external environmental aspects. Variables critical to deter attrition based on Tinto's model are social and academic integration. Along with social and academic integration, students' level of commitment to the collegiate environment is an important factor for persistence. Several researchers acknowledged that Tinto's social integration model alone did not address students' inability to become successfully integrated socially to navigate the campus setting. Even Tinto (2005) noted that research is needed to produce a more influential model that can provide an effective explanation of attrition. Tinto argues that present theories and methods only provide rough forecasts of attrition, which are insufficient to explain the influences of persistence in higher education. These concerns are shared by other researchers (e.g. Kuh, 2007; Miller, 2005), conveying that persistence rates indicate a growing phenomenon and inferring that action is required for all students to be able to thrive and persist in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

Most of the retention and attrition theoretical models in the literature attempt to address the lack of persistence of students in higher education. However, none of these theoretical models have been specifically tailored to address the complexity of

underrepresented undergraduate minority in PWIs from the perspective of

underrepresented graduate students. In unpacking these complexities, qualitative

explorations on this topic are lacking in the literature. This study will incorporate both

sociological and psychological theoretical perspectives such as self-determination and

student integration to gain a full understanding of the study area. Astin's Students

Involvement Model demonstrates an explanation for students' involvement as an

important premise for students' success. Self-determination theory provides the premise

for motivation and resiliency for examining underrepresented minority students' in the

collegiate setting. Tinto's Social Integration model offers, despite its flaws, a critical

explanation for the importance of becoming integrated in the collegiate environment.

This study will add acumen to the issue of attrition by drawing data from the target

population to understand how minority students integrate and interact within the

collegiate environment. Of importance to boost the persistence and the success of

underrepresented minority students in higher education are data-specific inquiries, all

encompassing, social, cultural, and psychological factors.

The literature shows that most of the past and current studies on underrepresented

minority students have used measures such as structured scales, neglecting the perception

of the affected population. In this sense, over the last 40 years, the extant literature

examined this phenomenon of attrition using quantitative research from the perspective

of positivist and post-positivist viewpoints. More specifically, strategies for decreasing

attrition of underrepresented undergraduate students continue to emerge, yet these

strategies are often presented without an understanding of the contextual experiences

faced by underrepresented minority students. Existing studies have used a hypothetically

based research design to test variables that they predicted to require consideration in

higher education andragogy. They have provided educators with a general scope of the

problems, which can intercept attrition factors to minimize some of the barriers.

In addition, Morse and Field (1995) contended that quantitative research has been

used as a normative mode to provide review boards and policy-makers with statistical

data. Although statistical reports are important to facilitate funding educational

institutions, figures alone do not reveal the quality of student experiences. Attention then

turns to re-examining the issue of underrepresented minority undergraduate attrition from

the perspective of those who lived the experience. The perspective of minority students

is lacking in the genre of studies on attrition. The inclusion this approach can form an

intervention model that can effectively and efficiently address the unique needs of

underrepresented minority students in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Terms Related to Attrition

There are many terms that help to understand the phenomenon of attrition (minority, at-risk, underrepresented, under-prepared etc.). These terms are defined below.

   Minority. African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander are all listed in the literature as minority populations based on racial constructs (Adams et al., 2010). However, minority students are also identified as minority based on gender; women are identified in the literature as a minority (Washington, 1996). In addition, there is a growing body of literature that has listed minority as those college and university students who fall within certain sexual orientations: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (Sanlo, 2005). Collectively, universities tend to vary in the definition of a minority student. The literature highlights the fact that universities use the minority categories for scholarships that explains the variation in how each university defines the label of minority student (Weir, 2001).

   For this study, the term minority is defined as any ethnic or racial group who may typically be underrepresented in higher education-i.e., colleges, and universities. This definition may refer to, but is not restricted to, Asian American, Hispanic, and African American students. Although Native Americans and women are historically underrepresented, they are not included as specific groups in this study. This is largely because current and available comparison data is used. Thus, most studies that examined minority students' college experiences do so based on enrollment, academic preparedness, retention, graduation, and attrition rates of White students in comparison to

three minority groups--Asian, African American, and Hispanic students (Arana,

Castaneda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Engle &

Lynch, 2009; Engle & Theokas, 2010; Fischer, 2007; Knapp et al., 2010; Seidman, 2006;

Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988, 1993,1997, 1998,1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006). For the

purpose of this study, minority college students will be defined as a racial composite of

African American and Hispanic (Hispanic and Latino will be used interchangeably)

college students who are at-risk of attrition.

At-risk underrepresented. A distinction is made between minorities and at-risk

students. Not all minority students are at risk in higher education. Studies, that have

examined the disparity amongst Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics in higher

education, found that Asian Americans were more successful in higher education and are

likely to have higher SAT and ACT scores than other minority groups (e.g., Engle &

Tinto, 2008). Asian Americans were also more likely to graduate within six years of

matriculation compared to all other college students (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993;

Swail et al., 2003). In addition, none of these studies have pinpointed Asian-American

college students as those with prolonged graduation and/or high attrition rates. In terms

of unsuccessful matriculation in higher education compared to other minority groups,

Asian Americans are not included (Horn & Berger, 2004; Hudson, 2003; Mingle, 1988).

Therefore, in this study at-risk or underrepresented minority has been defined in terms of

undergraduate students from minority groups who have a history of being at risk of not

completing a college degree within the stipulated time frame.

Most studies have pinpointed African American and Hispanic groups as underrepresented based on their high attrition rate and their delayed and/or low graduation rates in higher education (e.g., Dyce, Alboid & Long. 2012; Horn & Berger, 2004; Hudson, 2003; Perna, 2000). Other studies identified their under-preparedness academically, low grades, on-going need for remedial courses, or low-income and first-generation college student status (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2002; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, & Carroll, 2001). Other researchers highlighted their attainment of lower grades during the first year, fewer credits by their junior year, and unlikelihood of being involved in campus social life or of building relationships with professors (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Thayer, 2000; Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein & Hurd, 2009; Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Warburton et al., 2001). These markers identify barriers that contribute to attrition and low graduation rates.

Prior studies on attrition and low graduation of underrepresented minority students in higher education focused on the problem from a quantitative perspective. Studies on student persistence and minority students have used complex statistical methods and large sample sizes to help tease out the complexities among groups (Carter, 2006, p. 42). However, years of focusing on quantitative studies have not illuminated the problem of attrition from the perspective of successful minority students.

Attrition. Attrition is one of the most studied phenomena when exploring minority students and the challenges faced in higher education. It is also the most intractable issue in higher education (Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Summers, 2003; Summerskill, 1962; Tinto, 1993).

Attrition has been defined as the act of premature departure from college before a degree completion (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Tinto, 1975). Chang, Eagan, Lin, and Hurtado (2009) further expand the definition to include the context in which it is being studied. Therefore, attrition tends to mean different things to different parties. In particular, the meaning of attrition is assessed within the context of the student's academic goals, for example, an individual's disengagement and termination of an education before attaining a degree. The general consensus formed by the extant of studies on attrition revealed a strong association between under-preparedness (operationalized in terms of pre-college academic performance) and attrition (Boughan, 1998; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2002; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Lanni, 1997; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993, 2006; Zhao, 1999).

Under-preparedness. The term under-preparedness is defined as the lack of readiness for college coursework, which is discussed in the preponderance of literature on college attrition and retention (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Tinto, 1987, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2007). Hooker and Brand (2009) elaborated on the definition of college readiness as being prepared to successfully complete credit-bearing college coursework (without remediation) and having the necessary academic skills and self-motivation to persist and progress in higher education. Allensworth (2006) found that high school achievement is positively associated with college success.

According to ACT (2009), only 4% of African American and 10% of Hispanics met the criteria for all college readiness for four subjects -- Mathematics, Science, English, and Reading. On average, a 17-year-old African American student is four years behind the average White student; African American twelfth graders score lower than

White eighth graders in reading, math, US history, and geography, and the average scores of Hispanics are not significantly different from African Americans (Thernstorm & Thernstorm, 2003). Schmidt (2003) noted that Hispanics are under-prepared academically for college as well and that they require more remedial English and mathematics compared to white students. The Office of Institutional Research issued a 2002 report on student performance which found that Hispanic students had a 47% drop-out rate after their first year, with over 70% being unprepared for introductory English or Math (cited in Kane & Henderson, 2006). In addition, Shaw (1997) noted that African Americans and Hispanics are twice as likely to be enrolled in remedial education as their White and Asian counterparts. African American, Hispanic, and students from low-income status enroll in remedial coursework at the highest percentages (ACT, 2013). Remediation proponents infer that the need for college remediation is largely due to poor K-12 quality and lack of information for adequate college preparation (Dyce et al., 2012; Bettinger & Long, 2009; Greene & Foster, 2003). Thus, minorities entering colleges are perceived to have academic barriers because they were already predetermined and identified as having academic needs and requiring remedial courses.

A National Educational Longitudinal study reports that almost 60% of first-time college students took remedial courses in 2-year colleges compared to 29% in 4-year colleges (Bailey, Jenkin & Linbach, 2005), which prolongs their matriculation and completion beyond the six years of enrollment. Engle and Lynch (2009) found that low-income and minority students are over-represented in 2-year colleges, which are considered the pathway into higher education for under-prepared students.

According to a 2006 report from The Association of Community Colleges, the majority of the nation's African American and Hispanic students studied at community colleges. However, a major concern noted by researchers is that most of these students do not transition from 2-year colleges to 4-year institutions and/or complete a degree (Engle & Lynch, 2009).   A better understanding is needed of the barriers and challenges that impede underrepresented students in spite of efforts made through remedial courses.

In reviewing the literature on remedial programs, the data showed that over 98% of two-year institutions, 80% of four-year institutions, and 59% of all private institutions offer some form of remedial course for at-risk undergraduate students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Education researchers and university administrators are now increasingly interested in finding ways to improve access to remedial courses and thereby to increase academic performance, particularly of at-risk African American and Hispanic students (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Clark, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

In addition to remedial courses, some universities offer another type of academic assistance program. Supplemental Instruction Programs are currently being offered in over 500 universities and colleges across the US. The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange and Analysis (CSRDE) (2002) reported that most of these programs are used by minority groups who are among the highest at-risk for dropout and low academic performance in colleges and universities. In fact, 43.2% of African Americans and 38.5% of Hispanics reported the need for tutoring and special assistance in coursework upon entering college (Pryor, Hurtado, Soenz, Santos, & Korn, 2006).

These percentages were compared to 20% of Whites entering college who reported the need for similar assistance in coursework (i.e., mathematics) (Pryor, et al. 2006).

The students who are most in need of the academic assistance programs are not necessarily the ones who use it. Some of the reasons given for failure to use academic assistance programs were employment and family obligations which conflicted with the time the tutoring sessions were available and feeling stigmatized as academically challenged (Sedlacek, Longerbeam, & Alatorre, 2003). Consequently, this lack of availability and perceived stigmatization places some minority students at a disadvantage academically. Padilla (1996) inferred that successful students are those who are able to assess academic risk and to increase opportunities for academic success. Padilla's assertion was later confirmed by Wirth (2006) who stated that successful minority students are those who sought on-campus tutoring and support. An important barrier to minority students, who have other demanding obligations and are often unable to relinquish these obligations, is this lack availability to attend academic assistance sessions.

Retention. It is relatively difficult to discuss attrition without defining retention. Retention in educational settings is defined as students' continued study until successful completion of a degree (Fowler & Luna, 2009). Similarly, student persistence is referred to as the continual pursuit of a student in a degree program toward successful completion (Levitz & Noel, 1989). Fowler and Luna further expand the meaning of retention to include the act where some students persist and graduate and other students do not. In this study persistence and retention are concepts that will be used interchangeably.

Based on the review of literature, in this study retention is organized into four categories--academic, economic, social, and psychological.

Academic retention barriers. Academic barriers are any obstacles or challenges related to students' scholarship or educational preparedness. The challenges or obstacles that students encounter in the process of intellectual attainment, whether it is in the classroom setting, library, study hall, or at home are defined as academic barriers. Access to and attainment of a college degree has always been studied and linked to academic challenges as the main barriers to graduation from colleges and universities (Adelman, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2004, 2005). The literature illustrates the consequences of academic challenges amongst underrepresented minority students are evidence in the disparities of degree attainments. As of 2012, only 23% of African Americans and 15% of Hispanic age 25 and older had attained an undergraduate degree compared with 67% of Asians and 40% of Whites (Snyder & Dillow, 2013).

Economic retention barriers. Many studies have noted the significance of financial support as an essential factor affecting minority students (Aspray & Bernat, 2000; Ntiri, 2001). In fact, low socioeconomic status (SES) weighs heavily on the college experience of minority students who largely rely on financial support to attend college (Nora, 2001; Tinto, 1999). Economic barriers are defined as the financial costs and expenses students encounter while pursuing a college degree, such as the obligation of providing for basic living expenses and the burden of large student loans when they prematurely leave (Gladieux & Perna, 2005).

More specifically, the consequences of higher education attrition weigh heavily on economic and societal factors as a whole.

Numerous studies have alluded to the fact that a more educated society profits both

economically and socially from creating a skilled workforce (e.g., Community College

Survey of Student Engagement, 2010; College Board, 2008). Alternatively, a society

with increasingly failed degree completions negatively impacts the overall economic,

social, and cultural capital of the entire society. For this reason, policies that allocate

funds towards higher education are mostly viewed as an investment in the future

(Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2010; College Board, 2008; Engle

& Lynch, 2009). Additionally, economic policies to pursue a college degree have to be

consistent to address the unique and growing needs of the underrepresented minority

students in higher education institutions.

Social retention barriers. In this study, social barriers are defined as the

sociological and cultural factors that serve as challenges or obstacles for

underrepresented students. Social and cultural factors play critical roles in shaping

students' identities in a college environment (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Ortiz and

Santos (2009) identified the two most critical environments that influence and shape

undergraduate students' social, racial, and cultural identities-- home and college. In fact,

most researchers who have studied identity formation agree on the importance of identity

development for racial and ethnic groups' academic achievement in higher education

(e.g., Huynh & Fuligni, 2008; Ortiz & Santos, 2009). A developed sense of sociocultural

identity can boost academic attainment (Tierney, 2000).

Psychological retention barriers. A psychological barrier is defined as the

interruption of an individual's psychological processes: perception, cognition,

motivation, learning, attitude formation, and change (Newman, 1981).

Lett and Wright (2003) further expounded on the explanation of what defines

psychological barriers in college as perception of self which is associated with a sense of

isolation and alienation, depression, dissonance, and the discontinuance of education. In

addition, Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) cautioned that the endurance of

psychological barriers can lead to a self-perception which presents suppressed rage,

anxiety, and antagonism, any of which can result in psychopathology. Thus, learning

about underrepresented minority students' self-concept in the college milieu provides a

comprehensive understanding of how social psychological barriers work to impede

retention and ultimately can negatively impact the collegiate experience.

Indeed, understanding the self-concept seems plausible when discussing under-

represented minority college students' self-evaluation in the collegiate community. Self-

concept, extensively examined in empirical studies (e.g., Anderson, Hattie, & Hamilton,

2005; Butler & Gasson, 2005; Davis-Kean & Sander, 2001; Rubie- Davis, Hattie, &

Hamilton, 2006; Thompson & Richardson, 2001), is defined as an individual's perception

of self, formed through experiences with the world and interpretations of those

experiences (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976). Lent, Brown and Gore (1997) further

explain self-concept as it relates to academics as a student's attitudes and perceptions

towards their intellectual skills. In fact, some studies noted that a positive self-concept

may be a more fundamental explanation of academic achievement (e.g. Astin, 1993;

Caplan, Henderson, Henderson & Fleming, 2002; Holliday, 2009) for minority students

than it is for other students (e.g. Phinney & Alipuira, 1990; Portes & Wilson, 1976).

Despite the volume of research emphasizing academic and economic barriers,

Schulenberg, Maggs, and Hurrelmann (1999) suggested that various forms of social

psychological factors tend to impede minority student access to and navigation through educational programs. This imbalance in the literature underscores the need to identify how perception of self and other social-psychological contributors impede both access and persistence in underrepresented minority college matriculation. In the following section, a discussion of demographic characteristics, academic, social support, economic, psychological distress, cultural capital, and stereotype threat barriers will provide an overview of the literature of this study.

Attrition and Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of students in higher education identified in the literature as high risk or at risk of attrition span various variables. These variables include socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, first-generation college students, academically underprepared, and low academic performance. The attrition demographics discussed in the literature correlate with underrepresented minority students from African American and Hispanic groups (Horn & Berger, 2004; Hudson, 2003; Perna, 2000). In addition, lower socioeconomic status of students has a stronger correlation with attrition than higher socioeconomic status (e.g., Fischer, 2007; Haynes, 2008; Tinto, 1999). Numerous researchers have found that students who are at risk of attrition are mostly from minority groups (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992).

In fact, statistical evidence illustrates that African American and Latino undergraduate students have the highest rate of attrition in U.S. higher education institutions (CSRDE, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2007; Knapp et al., 2010; McPherson & Shulenburger, 2010). Other researchers (Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1994) posited that the common characteristics shared by first-

generation college students make them more susceptible to attrition than non- first-generation students. Bradburn (2002) found that first-generation college students are more likely to depart from higher education than students with parents who were college graduates. First-generation college goers with low-income status who are of African American or Hispanic descent are more likely than other students to be in full-time employment while enrolled in college (Engle, 2007). They are often under-prepared academically, require remedial classes, attain lower grades during the first year, attain fewer credits by their junior year, are less likely to be involved in campus social life, and are less likely to build relationships with professors (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tierney et al., 2009; Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Warburton et al., 2001). These markers identify the characteristics of the population who are challenged by barriers that may contribute to attrition and low graduation rates. Understanding the reasons for and patterns of barriers that lead to attrition and low graduation rates is a critical step to increase underrepresented minority retention in higher education.

Attrition and Student Engagement

A myriad of challenges that underrepresented minority students bring to higher education, as well as the challenges that they encounter when entering the collegiate setting form the attrition factors. Several research studies that examined attrition of undergraduate students have cited properties of Tinto's model of institutional departure (Beil, Reisen, Zea, & Caplan, 1999; Berger, 1997; Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000; Lichtenstein, 2002; Nora, 2001). These researchers have identified the lack of academic and social integration as an important influence on attrition among college students. Astin (1978), and, later,

Woodard, Mallory, and Luca (2001) highlighted factors such as student involvement as a core criterion to ensure an optimal learning environment in higher education. These researchers emphasize the importance of the interaction between the student and the environment. Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1999) have also identified the positive effect of peer interactions on student learning. Schroder and Hurst (1996) elaborated on Blocher's (1978) work by stating, "Learning is not a spectator sport—it is an active, not a passive, enterprise. [Accordingly], there is a learning environment that must invite, even demand, the active engagement of the student" (p. 174).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who were involved and engaged in collegial activities also persisted and completed their degrees. Roberts and McNeese (2010) used an online questionnaire of a Student Satisfaction Likert scale to measure students' level of involvement and integration in the collegiate setting. Roberts and McNeese examined students' involvement and engagement based on their original educational pathway. Their study indicated that efforts must be made to improve students' acclimatization to the collegiate setting. Findings in this study coincided with retention studies directed by Berger and Lyon (2005). This viewpoint promotes interaction, engagement, and integration as pivotal factors for optimal learning or thriving in the collegiate setting. Nonetheless, previous researchers' perspectives do not explain how non-motivated or non-responsive students can thrive in the learning environment.

Underrepresented minority students who are outnumbered within the collegiate setting in PWIs may find it challenging to integrate into the mainstream student group on campuses.

Underrepresented undergraduate minority students who do not become socially

integrated in the learning environment are likely to be at risk of attrition or of performing

poorly. However, the majority of existing literature examining underrepresented

undergraduate minority students' collegiate experience has focused on the student's

ability to become academically and socially integrated. Although other studies have

associated low academic performance and attrition of underrepresented minority students

with factors such as social isolation, stereotype threat (Aronson, 2002; Steele, 1997), self-

concept, and the extent of interaction with faculty and peers (Pascarella, Smart,

Ethington, & Nettles, 1987), these factors have not been extensively investigated.

Attrition and Academic Performance Barriers

Empirical studies have indicated that academic performance, measured by grade

point average (GPA) and high school academic achievement, are strong predictors of

whether a student will prematurely leave college before graduation or will persist. For

example, most of the early studies examined attrition with academic performance based

on GPA (Cambiano, Denny & DeVore, 2000; Kern, Fagley, & Miller, 1998) and high

school achievement variables (Astin, Korn, & Green, 1987; Levitz, Noel, & Ritcher

1999; Tross, Harper, Osher & Kneidinger, 2000). Others studies use pre-college and first-

year grade point to predict students' ability to persist in higher education (e.g., Bean,

2010; Ishitanti, 2006). Accordingly, Wu, Fletcher, and Oston (2007) noted four variables

as attrition risk factors; the first-year college GPA, high school GPA, and entry hours, as

the most commonly used variables for operationalizing academic constructs. Wu and

colleagues' findings, similar to other researchers, supported the theory of academic

assessments as important measures to determine college performance and persistence.

In a longitudinal study Schnell, Seashore Louis, and Doetkott (2003) found in addition to precollege academic assessment, students' characteristics were a critical factor for persistence towards graduation in college. Notably, researchers have acknowledged academic assessment as an important measure for college students' successes, but they have also noted that academic measures alone cannot be used to determine college persistence. Johnson (2012) found that 40% of students who leave higher institutions prematurely have GPAs with an average of an A or B and students with weak academic records represent only 15% of students who leave prematurely.

Student-Faculty Relationship

Another factor that affects underrepresented minority students' academic performance in colleges and universities is the lack of interaction with the faculty (e.g., Pascarella & Terezini, 2005). Claxton and Murrell (1987) characterize the student-faculty relationship that is a preferred style of instruction as interaction that is interpersonal rather than impersonal. Some researchers state when students have positive relationships with faculty, their affective and cognitive development increases (Nora & Cabera, 1996), their persistence increases (Pascarella & Terezini, 1976; 2005), and students experience overall satisfaction with college (Astin, 1977). Other researchers show familial support and student-faculty relationships have positive correlations with the development of academic self-efficacy and success for Latino students (e.g., Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Torres & Solberg, 2001). In particular, Sedlacek (1999) argued that a good faculty-student relationship is a determinant factor for minority student academic success. For minority students, management of academic factors includes role models in staff and faculty and a supportive environment.

Timely feedback on academic performance is an impetus for students; yet only about

50% of lecturers provide prompt feedback (Barefoot, 2000). A few studies examined the

impact of faculty –students' relationship (e.g., Love, 1993; Townsend, 1994 cited in

Harvey-Smith, 2002). Harvey-Smith contended that the level of interaction between

African American students and faculty is a predictor of their academic success. Torres

and Solberg (2001) posited that faculty involvement with minority students should be

encouraged both in class and out of class. In addition, Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, and

Alisat (2000) noted that underrepresented students are less likely to meet with faculty

members outside of class for assistance, and this negatively affects their academic

performance. Cole (2010) found that African American and Latino college students'

interaction with peers and faculty significantly impact their GPA. Cole posits that

African American students' GPA are affected the most by their interactions with college

peers and faculty members. The concern is that without the necessary integration with

faculty and the collegiate community, underrepresented minority students are more at-

risk of academic failure.

Academic and Social Integration Barriers

Studies have highlighted the importance of academic and social integration inside

and outside of the classroom as important factors for college persistence. For example,

Tinto's (1975, 1993) have pointed to academic under-preparedness as a factor that

contributes to the lack of academic integration. In addition, underrepresented

undergraduate minority students have been pinpointed in the literature as a group without

adequate college preparation to succeed (e.g., Tinto, 1987). In a study of 418

underprepared students, Peterson and Del Mas (2001) found that academic integration

has significant effects on persistence, but social integration had no direct relationship with retention. Students' ability to become intellectually involved in the classroom illustrates importance rather than their ability to integrate in the social life of the college. However, in a longitudinal study, Cress (2008) found student-faculty interpersonal interactions led to higher GPA. Cress found that students, who were academically underprepared when admitted to college, evaluated their academic abilities higher as a result of student-faculty interpersonal contacts. Intentional opportunities for student-faculty interactions lead to positive academic integration for the students in higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A central concept of Tinto's model is that both academic and social integration, leads to a sense of feeling part of the collegial setting and can ultimately increase persistence (Tinto, 1993).

In the last two decades some researchers questioned Tinto's position of academic and social integration as grounds for retention (e.g., Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tierney, 1992). Although the majority of studies on retention endorsed Tinto's and others' assumption that goal commitment sufficiently accounts for higher education success, other researchers have refuted this theory. For example, Perry, Cabrera, and Vogt (1999) argued that commitment to academic goals was not sufficient for higher education success. They found that academic performance is more that GPA. Perry et al. found a positive association with career development and students' commitment. Allen, Robbins, Casillas and Oh (2008) found that "academic self-discipline, pre-college academic performance, and pre-college educational development have indirect effects on retention and transfer" (p. 647).

Attrition and Economic Barriers

As higher education costs have risen over the past decade, more families have turned to student loans as a means for financing their degree pursuit (College Board, 2011). Several researchers have confirmed that factors such as parental educational level and economic status determine college students' unmet financial needs in pursuing a college degree (e.g., Charles, Roscigno & Torres, 2007; Heller, 2002; 2008; Paulsen & St John, 2002). In a longitudinal study, Bresciani and Carson (2002) examined how the level of unmet needs and the amount of financial grants received impact undergraduate students' abilities to persist in higher education. These authors found that inadequate financial support was a strong predictor of lack of persistence. Bresciani and Carson did not classify the type of institution, nor did they list the student demographics; however, they found that inadequate financial support has a negative influence on students' abilities to persist. However, financial support in the form of student loan weighs heavily on the rate of attrition in higher education institutions (Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Heller, 2008).

The significance of economic and financial factors on underrepresented minority student's commitment varies in terms of whether student loans correlate with degree completion for minority students in comparison to minority students who do not rely on loans. Perna (2000) did not find an association among student loans and college persistence among minority students. Cunningham and Santiago (2008) found that minority students who borrowed student loans are more likely to complete their college degree.

In addition, Cunningham and Santiago (2008) argued that both African American and Latino students are more likely to use student loans to ensure that their educational opportunity can be utilized. Of grave concern is that more than 70% of African American students who take out student loans do not attain a college degree (Jackson & Reynolds, 2013).

Attrition and Psychological and Social Factors

Social Support Barriers. Skahill (2002) examined whether social support impacted residential and commuter students' persistence at a technical arts college. Skahill found that residential students were more likely to report feelings of social and academic integration. The limitation of this study was the small sample size (n=40); however, the results indicated that residential students were more likely to persist than commuter students. Elkins et al. (2000) examined how aspects of separation influenced the decisions of 411 students at a public higher education institution. A survey instrument that was derived from Tinto's concepts on separation was administered to the participants. Similar to previous research, this study indicated that support networks had the most effect on students' decision to persist in higher education. In addition, Elkins et al. found that racial or ethnic minority undergraduate students receive less support from their social network for college attendance. Social support influences ethnic and racial college students' experiences in different ways. Pidcock et al. (2001) found that for Latino college students, the strongest predictors for attrition are academic performance, family support, and encouraging social experiences. Underrepresented minorities may not have individuals in their family or social network that can support their academic undertakings (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes & Thomas, 2009).

In addition, Latino female students prematurely left college at a higher rate than male students as they have to respond to cultural expected responsibilities of females. For example, females experience a great deal of pressure to become wives and mothers (Cardoza, 1991), while males are more likely to be encouraged to attend college (Chacon, Cohen & Strover, 1986). Latino females are more likely to be faced with the challenges of joggling academic aspiration and familial responsibility than males (Romero & Sy, 2008) requiring more research to determine how family obligations affect Latino students (Sanchez, Esparza, Colon & Davis, 2010).

Psychological Distress Barriers. In a longitudinal study of 718 students in a freshman class, Bray et al. (1999) used three separate surveys to determine the impact of psychological distress on retention. They found that students who engaged in behavioral disengagement when encountering with a stressful situation were less likely to be socially integrated into the collegiate setting. Students who were challenged with stressful situations and felt that they could not confide in other students were more likely to turn to withdrawal and social distancing. Bray et al found that how students manage stress highly influenced their persistence. Gloria, et al. (1999) administered self-reported surveys to 98 African American undergraduates attending large PWIs, and found both negative self-beliefs and lack of social support to be important factors that threaten students' retention. Gloria et al. found that self-esteem and degree-related self-efficacy had a positive relationship with persistence decisions. When African American students have a positive self-belief of their ability to complete academic-related tasks, they are more likely to persist in higher education (Gloria et al. 1999).

Numerous psychological factors influence the ways that undergraduate students adapt to collegiate settings impacting their ability to persist. Pritchard and Wilson (2003) forecasted academic success using factors not often used in retention studies. Frequently retention studies depend on demographic and academic variables. They used various psychological scales in their study including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Profile of Mood States to assess students' emotional (e.g., depression, stress level) and social well-being (e.g., student association membership). Pritchard and Wilson found that both emotional and social well-being have a positive association with student academic performance minimizing attrition. Students who specified their intention to leave the university prematurely were those who reported lower self-esteem and psychological well-being than students who had a higher level of psychological functioning. Tross and colleagues (2000) examined how personality characteristics such as conscientiousness and resiliency can predict academic performance and retention. Students' ability to be diligent and resilient can forecast their persistence in higher education. These qualities are developed and form as a result of individuals' relationships and interactions within their environment such as nurturing and building up of self-image, dignity, and self-esteem.

If a good self-evaluation is important for students' success, then it becomes important to identify favorable factors that constitute successful personalities. Given the findings from Tross et al's study, a positive relationship between conscientiousness and college GPA may support retention. This positive relationship suggests that students' personalities play a critical role in their ability to persist in higher education.

Tinto's (1975) theory echoes the sentiments of this study that personality drives retention in regards to goodness- of-fit and students' ability to engage both socially and academically.

However, some students may find it difficult to establish meaningful rapport in collegial settings and may feel that the university is not sensitive enough to accommodate their cultural, linguistic, and economic variations. As a fall-out from this experience in the educational setting, some students begin their journey on grounds of alienation that may ultimately lead to social and academic disengagement.

Considering all these factors, it becomes evident that attrition happens not purely because of academic difficulties; indeed, how students are perceived and received in the college milieu also plays an important role. Other factors to be considered are students' self-perception and their perception of the college milieu.

Cultural Capital Barriers. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is defined as competence or skill that cannot be separated from its bearer (that is, a person's cultural integrity). Empirical evidence supports the significance of cultural integrity by referencing how racial or ethnic undergraduate minority students gain security from their cultural affiliation (Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Museus, 2008; Tierney, 1992). Educational systems must function from the assumption that it is necessary to help underrepresented students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). In a qualitative study, Museus (2008) examined the experiences of 24 Asian American and African American undergraduate students.

Museus found that ethnic and racial student organizations assisted in the adjustment and membership of underrepresented minority students in higher education by helping them to function in culturally safe spaces. In the general sense, ethnic enclaves provide cultural familiarity, opportunities for encouragement, and sources of validation for underrepresented minority college students (Atkinson, Dean & Espino, 2010; Museus, 2008). Walker and Schultz (2001) suggested that for Latino students in higher education, several variables including academic stress, lack of a sense of belonging, and economic distress serve as barriers to college persistence. They argued that cultural values are of utmost relevance to Latino students in higher education. Ybarra (2000) examined the persistence of Latino students and found that language barriers accounted for attrition in some students. Some Latino students with linguistic challenges struggle in classrooms. Also, some Latino students found it difficult to articulate their views in written assignments due to language barriers. Ybarra contended that faculty members provoke tension by appealing for cultural conformity in the classroom, leaving students of different cultures to contend with the challenge of understanding the mainstream culture. Students should not feel that they are required to abandon their culture to fit into the collegial setting. In addition, Rendón et al. (2000) expounded on the concepts of biculturalism and dual socialization by advocating that research needs to unearth the impact of multiple issues on access and persistence of the growing diverse student population in U.S. higher education institutions.

Stereotype Threat Barriers. Steele (1997) defines stereotype threat as the "social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or does something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (p. 614).

Steele and Aronson (1995) established how implicit stereotypes about the intellectual

inferiority of African Americans engendered stereotype threat and, consequently,

undermined those students' academic performance. According to Rosenthal and Crisp

(2006), what is necessary to engender stereotype threat is to be placed in a situation

where the stereotype is salient. Massey and Fischer (2005) further expounded on this

explanation by stating that a stereotype threat may be particularly salient within a higher

education context where there are deeply inherent societal stereotypes concerning

academic competence. In this context, several researchers examined the effect of

stereotype threat on the academic performance of African Americans and have generated

related outcomes (e.g., Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; McKay et al, 2002; Osborne,

2001; 2007). Other researchers found negative influences of stereotype threat on Latino

students (e.g., Gonzales et al, 2002; Schmader & Johns, 2003). Pinel, Warner, and Chua

(2005) found that stigma consciousness that is associated with stereotype threat decreases

the academic performance and academic engagement of African Americans and Latino

students. Similar studies point to the negative impact of injurious racial experiences that

alienate affected students from mainstream students. The challenge of stereotype threat

is that it produces an internal dialogue in which individuals assume that they are

incapable of succeeding (Osborne, 2006; Koch, 2002 cited in Smith, 2009). Racial

situations associated with stereotype threat have the most negative effect on

underrepresented minority students who may find it challenging to strive in the collegial

setting. African American and Latino students more than White students reported a

higher degree of stereotype threat.

Some researchers point to underrepresented undergraduate minority level of psychological dissonance within a social context in PWIs. They argue that negativity impacts the ability of students to perform effectively academically; as such, both social and psychological factors can interfere with academic interaction (e.g., Taylor & Miller, 2002). Some researchers hold the viewpoints that for Latino college students, leaving a familiar environment with a large Latino culture to attend a PWI can result in a sense of dislocation (Nunez, 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Yosso, 2006). Consequently, adapting to academic discourse in unfamiliar settings paired with linguistic and cultural differences can be alienating and hostile for these students. Hertel (2002) contended that underrepresented minority students receive the worse social experiences in the college environment. This interaction with the larger collegial setting is sometimes a strain, causing underrepresented minority students' levels of individuality and autonomy to become weakened or disempowered in the college settings. This strain can dwindle underrepresented minority students' sense of belonging to the larger collegial setting, causing them to become at risk "of falling through the cracks, dropping, or flunking out" (Rinn, 1995, p. 11). Seidman (2006) contends that negative occurrences will weaken the noblest intentions.

Owens and Massey (2011) found that internalizing negative stereotypes brought about dis-identification and a decrease of academic effort. White students do not experience such internalization effects; however, minority students are more likely to internalize this threat impacting their academic performance in college (Owens & Massey, 2011).

In this sense, it is unclear how underrepresented minority students who are successful have prevailed against stereotype threats to become successfully socially integrated into higher education institutions.

Retention Programs

Almost all of 4-year universities (95%) in the U.S. offer First Year Experience (FYE) retention programs to incoming freshman students (Jamelske, 2009). FYE programs are geared to enhance the first year college experiences through first year seminars--introductory courses coupled with residence hall activities. This program is administered as an extension to orientation; however, each higher education institution offers their FYE program independently. The general objectives of FYE retention programs are to increase students' performance and to ultimately encourage students 'persistence towards degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Several researchers have investigated FYE retention programs with varying outcomes. Fidler and Moore (1996) found that FYE programs are only effective with students who live on campus. Jamelske (2009) identified a limitation in how the program is administered regarding the time allotted to integrate FYE goals and the assigned first year seminar courses. Myers (2003) reviewed retention programs and concluded that the institutional environment influences students' success. Myers noted that higher education institutions that were responsive to academic, social, and cultural needs of their students had higher retention rates, recognizing that attempts to improve underrepresented minority college completion cannot be addressed in isolation from other groups of students and the institution as a whole.

Each institution has its own culture, and as such, it is not only necessary to examine the student's culture, but it is equally important to examine how these two cultures influence underrepresented minority students' collegiate experiences.

Smith (2009) cautioned that accountability initiatives are unproved in ways that disaggregate their impact on low-income and ethnic populations due to their low graduation rates. For example, initiatives and retention programs such as orientation and the bridge programs claim to be successful. Although this claim may be true, there are not many published reports to indicate the success of the populations in question who participate in these programs. This claim warrants additional scientific exploration to determine what role university policies play in the evaluation of such programs. This is particularly so since evaluation and analyses of programs rely on graduation rates as indices of successful implication. The focus of universities' evaluation of orientation, FYE, and bridge programs is not to understand and capture students' journeys from admission to graduation (Jamelske, 2009; Moore et al., 2007). However, for underrepresented and at-risk students such evaluation is necessary to help the students, but more importantly to minimize program lacunae. Consequently, underrepresented minority students such as African American and Latino students remain adversely affected by the significance of unintended outcomes from programs (Midgley & Livermore, 2009).

Summary

The literature alerts us that voluminous research has been conducted in an effort to address the problem of minority attrition in higher education. While these studies have identified several variables that are predictive of attrition, the disparity in underrepresented undergraduate minority students' retention yet remains enigmatic. Sadly, the emergence of a wide variety of research studies intended to help circumvent problems that severely impact underrepresented minority undergraduate student's retention and subsequently their ability to persist (e.g., Museus, 2011; Seidman, 2006; Swail et al. 2003; Tinto, 2007) has not yielded much success. Several different factors have been referenced in the literature as contributing factors to underrepresented minority undergraduate students' attrition. These factors include the following: academic preparation factors related to pre-college and college levels and grade point averages; first-generation college student; social integration into the collegiate setting; economic deprivation; alienation; student – faculty interactions; and race and ethnicity factors. These factors represent a constellation of academic and psychosocial factors or barriers when studying students and their social environments (Schriver, 2004).

Considerations of previous studies are vital because they will likely impact the approach used in this study. Among over 800 found on large databases such as Jstor, PsycINFO, EBSCO, and ProQuest using search terms (e.g., college, attrition, retention, and underrepresented minority) during 2010 -2013, most have used quantitative inquiries as the method for forming their models. This review of the literature on attrition demonstrates the theories and models used to close the interactional perspectives connecting students' success to Tinto's original model.

A rift in the literature is created by the absence of the examination of broader areas on what has kept underrepresented minority students from graduating. Past research has advanced the general understanding of student's success in higher education; however, it has been limited in highlighting the viewpoints of underrepresented minority students. Thus, most of the studies over the last four decades have studied attrition in isolation from the perspective of minority students. Notwithstanding, research that contributes to underrepresented undergraduate minority's motivation and resilience and leads to their engagement in the college environment has been largely absent from the literature.

Gaps in Current Knowledge

Despite significant growth in college attendance rates, gaps between White and underrepresented minority students have persisted over time (Engle & Lynch, 2009). Although access to higher education is more available to minority students than it was 40 years ago, once in college, minority students are less likely than White students to graduate within six years of being admitted. Alarmingly, the gaps that separate Latino and African American students from their White counterparts are wider today than they have been since 1975 (Engle & Lynch, 2009). Initiatives to boost minority students' participation and achievement rates will also increase enrollment and graduation rates and, even more importantly, social equity (McPherson & Shulenburger, 2010). Having embarked on a review of literature from over the past 40 years on the problem of minority retention and attrition higher education, some recurring themes and gaps in the data have been observed. These recurrences have provided a catalyst for this research as the results identify some keen gaps and needs for exploratory studies on this phenomenon.

One critical revelation toward this perspective is that numerous studies, predominantly quantitative studies, have identified what leads to underrepresented minority students' attrition over decades; none of these studies were able to point to what leads to persistence. Along that same continuum, these studies reflected how many underrepresented minority students were dropping out of college; however, numbers alone do not tell the mechanism and perceptions of the target population.

Clearly, attrition in higher education is a complex issue; as such, more descriptive research is required to understand this social phenomenon. Existing literature points to several possibilities of additional inquiry into the underrepresented undergraduate minority collegiate experience. First, existing research on attrition does not differentiate between social psychological attrition factors of underrepresented undergraduate minority students and other students in the collegiate settings. Second, social psychological variables may have a different effect on the underrepresented minority student in many aspects of the college experience. There is a paucity of studies that highlight and explore the lived experiences of the two main underrepresented undergraduate minority groups, African Americans and Latinos (e.g., Padilla, et al., 1997). This study examined the problem of attrition from the perspective of underrepresented graduate minority students who have successfully completed a four-year degree within six years of enrollment or who are in their junior or senior year.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research study is twofold: (a) to examine successful students' perceptions of barriers and; (b) to see how successful students managed to overcome these barriers. Understanding both the barriers that underrepresented minority students in higher education face and learning about how they negotiate and navigate through the educational system may shed light and help us to decrease attrition rates. Understanding what leads to resiliency of underrepresented populations can shape educational policy, lead to better interventions, foster development of resiliency-based theoretical frameworks, and perhaps bolster the role that social work can play in promoting retention and graduation of minority students in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The perceptions of underrepresented minority college students were studied using phenomenology. A phenomenological approach was thought to best suit the study because it allowed African American and Latino minorities' to share their experiences of success in higher educational settings despite its complexity but in their own words. This qualitative study explored what lead underrepresented minority college students to graduate successfully. More specifically, it explored how the participants' experienced, perceived, and constructed realities of persistence in a PWI. It further attempted to gain an understanding of the underrepresented minority students' resilient experiences using a qualitative research method.

Design and Rationale

The empirical research reviewed in the last chapter points to a significant gap in the literature. If we are to fully understand and address minority disproportionality rates in higher education, we must respond to and examine these needs. Usually, in studying phenomena researchers investigate the population at-risk. Burchinal (1965) suggests that as important as that is to deepening our understanding, it is also critical to examine the exceptions. Examine how individuals who experience similar challenges or dilemmas successfully overcame. This study responded to one such factor, the perceived barriers for African American and Latino students and the successes attained as they responded to these barriers. Additionally, there was an aim to help narrow the gap in our understanding of how successful African American and Hispanic undergraduate students navigated higher education.

With knowledge that many previous studies used quantitative approaches to understand factors, which helped minority students to graduate (Allensworth, 2006; Ryu, 2009) it was important to use a different study method. An exploratory qualitative research design guided by a semi-structured questionnaire allowed the participants to tell their story and define their experiences (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). A qualitative method offers a richer understanding of how underrepresented minority students experience matriculation. In qualitative studies, the researcher is involved in the process of understanding and examining how new and shared meanings influence the lives of those who experienced it (McGregor & Murnane, 2010); it is suitable for producing an in-depth understanding of the meaning of everyday social interaction (Howie, Coulter & Feldman, 2004). In addition, Freeman (2011) asserted that understanding cannot be considered as a fixing of meaning but as how the meaning is created and transformed. "As we understand something we are involved and as we are involved we understand" (Welch, 1998, p. 242).

The use of the phenomenological method shifts the focus on students' perceptions of the world in which they live and what it meant to them. Phenomenological studies enable researchers to examine first-person accounts and narratives of social interactions (Davidson, Stayner, Lambert, Smith, & Sledge 2001). This study was anchored in a phenomenological methodology and was guided by an interpretive (hermeneutic) perspective with the goal of understanding the complex lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Schwandt, 2001). Phenomenological questions were used to guide the study.

Phenomenological questions are used to "open the field for the participant to begin describing their experiences with the phenomenon" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 48). On a select Indiana campus, interviews were conducted with graduates and currently enrolled students of various undergraduate programs. As such, each participant was asked open-ended questions, which prompted him or her to reflect on their experience as underrepresented minority students. These questions were:

1. Can you describe, in detail, what your experience has been like as an underrepresented minority student at this university?

2. Describe your perception of self (self-concept) as an underrepresented minority student at this university.

3. What are some of the barriers that you face at this university that can impede your degree completion?

4. What are some of the key supports, strategies that you accessed or found helpful in addressing these barriers? (*See Appendix B* for complete list of guiding questions).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, rooted in German philosophy, predates World War I. It has a prominent position in contemporary philosophy. Van Manen (1990) explained the dictum of phenomenology as ''Zu den Sachen,'' which is commonly referred to ''to the things themselves'' and ''let's get down to what matters'' (p. 184). Palmer (1969) earlier reasoned that phenomenology is the means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of accessing a genuine connection to the experience. Phenomenology is best articulated "as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the

attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer" (Moran, 2000, p. 4). The phenomenological method is often explicated in two schools of thought--one developed by *Edmund Husserl* and one developed by *Martin Heidegger* (Creswell, 2007).

The Phenomenology of Husserl

Edmund Husserl (1963; original work 1913), a German philosopher is accredited as the founder of phenomenology, even though the term was used by early philosophers, Kant and Hegel (Moran & Mooney, 2002). Husserl was concerned with exploring the conscious lived experience of phenomena, particularly understanding the participant's world by underscoring the description of their lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl put forth two persuasive principles of phenomenology: 1) philosophy is a rigorous science, and 2) philosophy consists in description and not causal explanation (Moran, 2000). Husserl's approach is characterized as descriptive phenomenology. In Husserl's attempt to present the phenomenological approach as a rigorous scientific method, he introduced the process of bracketing to maintain objectivity. When conducting a research study using descriptive phenomenology, Husserl believes that researchers are required to relinquish their prior knowledge about the experience being investigated, and to acquire a neutral approach without preconception about the phenomenon (Dowling, 2004). However, another phenomenological philosopher, Heidegger (1962), had the viewpoint that it is not possible to negate our experiences related to the phenomenon being studied (cited in Reiners, 2012).

Heidegger views personal awareness as fundamental to phenomenological research (cited in Reiners, 2012).

The Phenomenology of Heidegger

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who was a student of Husserl, defined phenomenology as the concept of being and not solely a description of individual experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Moran (2000) noted that Heidegger's phenomenology encompasses a hermeneutic (interpretive) dimension. In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger emphasizes the importance of the interpretation of the meaning behind the meaning. Heideggerian thinking offers a threefold fore-structure: 1) **A fore-having:** we come to a situation with a practical familiarity, that is, with background practices from our world that make an interpretation possible; 2) **A fore-sight**: because of our background we have a point of view from which we make an interpretation; and 3) **A fore-conception**: because of our background we have some expectations of what we might anticipate in an interpretation (Plager, 1994, p.71-72). In phenomenological study, bracketing is considered a Husserlian tradition in which the researcher brackets their own experiences in order for them to not taint the story of the participants (Laverty, 2003).

Unlike Husserl, Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology purports that researchers are not required to bracket their own interpretations of the participants' experiences. With interest in both interpreting and describing human experience, Heidegger believed that bracketing was not justifiable because hermeneutics presumed prior understanding (Langdridge, 2007; Reiners, 2012). In this context, "the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to interpretive process" (Laverty, 2003, p. 17). Interpretative phenomenological

researchers show how their own experiences have shaped the choice of research topic, the

questions, and their interpretations. As such, the researcher's understanding of the

theoretical perspectives that have been used to study attrition forms some of her

presuppositions. Although some phenomenological approaches i.e., transcendental

phenomenology, would require that I bracket my presuppositions, and not to use an

existing theory regarding the phenomenon under examination, interpretative

phenomenology does not. The interpretative phenomenological approach generally

requires that at least an awareness of my presuppositions be outlined. Theoretical

framework in this study is not meant to bias the data collection but is part of the

researcher's presuppositions or preconceptions, and not part of the methodology. My

understanding is that theories provide "scope" to understand the world. In addition,

having examined the literature on attrition over time, the likelihood of forming a

theoretical background before entering the field for data collection is very likely. This

occurs whether the researcher acknowledges it or not; however, in the hermeneutic

approach this acknowledgment is appropriate. This does not mean that my scope of

study cannot and will not be transformed after entering the field. Heidegger describes

this fore-structure as the ongoing, situated nature of human understanding of a

phenomenon (Dreyfus, 1991). He refers to a researcher's position in the inquiry, as

humans are always/already part, which is important in interpretive phenomenological

studies. Therefore, I have chosen not to bracket as the literature and theory reviewed thus

far has provided me a unique lens to see this gap and to inform my new knowledge as I

interview the participants. Ten questions, grounded in the phenomenological study

framework but not informed by any other theory, were used to interview participants.

Thus, phenomenology provided the ontological and epistemological rationale for this inquiry. In addition, the researcher provided a subjectivity statement outlining the rationale for this choice of study.

Sample

Most phenomenological studies using sample sizes of two to ten participants are considered an appropriate sampling frame (Boyd, 2001). Creswell (1998) suggests that interviews can last for two hours with up to ten participants in a phenomenological study. In this context, a purposive sampling method was used to recruit ten to fifteen undergraduate students and graduates of undergraduate program for this study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research. This type of sampling approach allows the researcher to select participants because they can provide insight into the phenomenon, which is being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Accordingly, Padget (2008) has stated "As a general rule, qualitative researchers use purposive sampling—a deliberate process of selecting respondents based on their ability to provide the needed information…. [this] is done for conceptual and theoretical reasons, not to represent a larger universe" (p.53).

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants for this study a request was made to the offices of Diversity, Access, and Achievement, the Multicultural Center, and Career Services at a Midwestern university. These offices provide programs for minorities students. Permission was granted by these offices to announce to students enrolled in their programs about the study. An email invitation was sent out by the aforementioned offices with an announcement of the study to the potential participants asking them if

they were interested in participating in a research study, which explores the barriers that underrepresented minority students' face in higher education and ways that they address these barriers. The invitation emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and informed participants of the benefits and risks associated with the study. Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher via email or phone if they were interested in participating. After generating a list from the email responses of all the juniors and seniors who were identified as underrepresented minority students, participants were selected using purposive sampling. Similarly, from the generated list from the email responses of all those who have graduated (completed their undergraduate degree within the last five years) and have identified as underrepresented minority students, 12 participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves searching for cases or individuals who meet the selection criteria (Padget, 2008), which makes this type of sampling appropriate for this study.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each of the participants' names to ensure anonymity. Prior to conducting each interview, the researcher asked participants to sign a consent form. The researcher's contact information was provided to ensure prospective participants were able to access any needed clarification before making a decision to participate in the study. Participants who responded to the e-mail expressing interest in participating were contacted individually by phone or email to determine their availability and to arrange a convenient location for the interview (*see Appendix B* for a copy of the recruitment email).

In addition, during the interview three participants recommended potential participants who they felt met the criteria to participate in the study. The researcher contacted all potential participants who agreed to participate in the study.

Inclusion Criteria. There were four inclusion criteria for this study. Participants had to be: 1) students attending or who previously attended the focal university, 2) students who were from two underrepresented minority groups (African American and Latino), 3) students who were classified as junior or senior year in an undergraduate program, or graduates from an undergraduate program, and 4) students who demonstrated the ability to communicate their undergraduate experience in English.

Exclusion Criteria. As criteria for exclusion, I did not interview students who were not from an African American or Latino minority groups. Also, students who were in their freshman year or sophomore year of college were not included in this study. Students who have completed their undergraduate studies more than 5 years ago were not included in this study.

The rationale for using the two groups was to be able to compare the basic barriers which students who have completed their undergraduate degree encountered and which junior and senior undergraduate students encountered. Completion of the first two years of college level matriculation is considered attainment of success because research shows that the two first years of undergraduate matriculation are the most critical years, with the highest rate of attrition occurring within that period. Several studies have concluded that the biggest attrition takes place during the freshman and sophomore years of college matriculation (e.g., Ishitani & Desjardins, 2002; Tinto 1993).

Students who continue beyond their sophomore year will have an average higher cumulative GPA and more credits than students who drop out before their sophomore year (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott & Mianzo, 2006). Students who persist beyond the junior or senior years of higher education are more likely to complete their undergraduate degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Consequently, students in their junior or senior years were considered appropriate for this study because they are better able to assess the barriers and mechanisms, which they have used to navigate successfully the first two years of higher education matriculation. Also, including students who successfully graduated (success is defined as completing an undergraduate degree within 6 years after being admitted to a higher education institution) was used in this study. These two groups of students were interviewed to explore the perceived barriers they have encountered during their educational pursuit and the strategies, which they used to prevail to successful completion.

Data Collection Procedure

After scheduling an interview time and location with each participant, an informed consent form was provided for the participant to sign. The consent form provided detailed information relating to the purpose of the study, the procedures, and any possible risks to participation. In addition, the consent form had a box where participants checked indicating whether they were or were not comfortable with being audiotaped. All of the participants who were interviewed gave consent for the interviews to be audiotaped. All participants were given a 10-dollar Starbucks gift card as a courtesy for their participation in this study.

All participants were informed that the data will be kept in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to this information. Participants were told that their names and the name of their university were given pseudonyms.

In-Depth Interviews

In phenomenological studies, uncovering an understanding of the phenomenon in question starts with the data collection process. Prior to the in-depth interviews, descriptive data for each participant were collected. This provided the demographic background on individual participants. The in-depth interview focused on gathering participants' interpretations and feelings about their personal experiences, rather than trying to find some objective truth. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with what resonates with the participant, and how they make sense of things. The in-depth interviews seek to find not just "what he/she experienced," but what it means to the participant. As such, it was important to have the participant elaborate, and for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions that allowed the participant to dig deeper. The researcher carried out an in-depth interview with each participant guided by open-ended questions (*see Appendix C*). The open-ended questions were used to ask participants what barriers they encountered and how they managed to prevail against perceived attrition barriers in their undergraduate matriculation. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed in an attempt to elicit what Denzin (1970) describes as narrative "based on personal experience," with a "narrative structure which details a set of events" (Denzin, 1970, p. 186).

Interview Procedure

Upon receiving IRB's approval to conduct the study, communication was made with fifteen potential participants from whom I conducted 11 interviews between June 2014 and August 2014 (*see Appendix A*) using face-to faces single interviews with each participant. The decision to conduct a single interview was made after attending the Institute for Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology at the Indiana University School of Nursing during the summer of 2014. According to the teachings at the institute, employing single interviews permits the researcher to gain an understanding of the participant's interpretation of their individual experience at that moment in time. Once an interview is conducted, the interview experience itself will have unavoidably influenced how the participant now interprets their individual experience, which would be reflected in enigmatic ways in later interviews. According to Ironside (2014), any subsequent interview will inevitably change the participant's interpretations of the phenomena. Since the cycles and processes of interpretations never end, the researcher is astute to recognize the perimeters of any research endeavor and seek a thorough understanding of what is admittedly documented as a snapshot in time (P. Ironside, June 17, 2014, personal communication). Thus, single interviews were conducted with the possibility of a follow-up interview only if it was deemed necessary to gain further clarification.

All 11 of the participants chose to be interviewed on campus agreeing on the university's library as the focal location for interviews. For confidentiality purposes, rooms were reserved for three hours, which was beyond the duration of individual interviews.

This was fundamental to ensure that participants were interviewed in a location that was safe and comfortable for them. Interviews were limited to 90 minutes in length to circumvent inconveniencing the participants. In the end, interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes, with the average length of 65 minutes.

This allowed sufficient time to explore the topic in depth as fitting for each participant. Each interview was recorded using an audiocassette recorder.

Individual interviews began by forming rapport as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2003). Subsequently, I introduced dialogue by posing a phenomenological question. The scope of the phenomenological question is of great importance, as it frames the possible parameters of the forthcoming dialogue. The question essentially opens the field for the participant to begin telling their experiences with the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989).

At the end of the interview, each participant was asked to add any information, which they felt, might have been left out during the interview. At the end of several of the interviews participants continued to share after the recorder was turned off. I invited additional questions and comments. Some participants stated that they were quite relieved that they were able to share their experiences. Some stated that they were not aware that the "university" cared about how they felt even when the recorder was turned off, and all of the participants thanked me for doing such a research study.

A reflexive journal was used immediately following each interview to record the researcher's impressions, reactions, and other significant events (Ortlipp, 2008). Keeping a reflexive journal during fieldwork helped me to retain my focus and support throughout the process.

According to Riessman (1993), it is during the transcription process that the researcher becomes acquainted with the data. Several researchers agreed that an open attitude is required in order to unveil meanings in the data and to let unpredicted meanings emerge (e.g., Giorgi, 2011; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Data Analysis

I started the data analysis process after completion of all 11 interviews. The main tenet of qualitative data analysis involves coding the data into meaningful sections and assigning names to the sections, then combining the codes into broader categories or themes, and finally displaying and making a comparative discussion (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, Polkinghorne (1989) noted that a well-constructed phenomenological study generally utilizes the following data collection and analysis process: 1) interpersonal interviews with up to 10 individuals who are willing to share their experiences, 2) transcribing the interview data, 3) locating relevant statements in the transcripts that express self-contained units of meaning, 4) identifying the meanings contained in each segment, and 5) synthesizing the themes across interviews to create a general description of what it is like to experience the phenomenon of interest. In keeping with Heideggerian phenomenology, Polkinghorne specified that the interpretive stage encompass the historical meanings of experience and amassed effects. In this sense, Heidegger's hermeneutic approach was used for the data analysis in this study as put forth by Laverty (2003), Polkinghorne (1989), and Ricoeur (1981). The fore-structure, reflexivity, coding, thematic, and interpreting analysis were categorized into four phases of application:

- *Phase 1: Pre-understanding*: The researcher's fore-structure, which encompasses the understanding, and prior knowledge on the meaning of the phenomena.

- ***Phase 2: Explanation***: After transcribing each interview, I checked it against the recording to ensure accuracy (Crist & Tanner, 2003). I then began the initial analysis of each individual transcript by first reading each transcript slowly from beginning to end. The text were read and reread to ensure that no ideas were overlooked or erroneously assumed to be duplicated. Then transcripts and notes were analyzed, and individually coded to free nodes.

- ***Phase 3: Naïve Understanding***: At level 3, I re- examined the free nodes that were coded in level 2 analysis checking each to gain an understanding of which are closely connected ideas. This entailed coding words, phrases, or sentences that narrated anything about the participant's experience while pursuing their undergraduate degree. Ironside (2003) suggested that this process is necessary "to gain an overall understanding of the text" (p. 511). Then, identification of words, phrases, and sentences, which were identical, were placed in main themes and sub-themes. Then the thematic analysis moved to meaning and interpretation (Crist & Tanner, 2003).

- ***Phase 4: Interpretation:*** The process of arriving at an in-depth understanding encompasses moving back and forth between the three phrases --the hermeneutic circle. During my initial reading of the text I did not made any notes. I re-read the text slowly and then highlighted concepts, topics, ideas, and meanings as recommended by Benner (1994). I used the marked highlights as my preliminary themes. Multiple themes were formed and after the list was reviewed by the hermeneutic circle, I decided on six themes and key support strategies.

Phenomenological themes are understood as the structures of lived experience

(Van Maren, 1990). At this stage of the analysis, six main themes and sub-themes

were used to document the in-depth meaning of the text.

Data-storing Method

According to Groenewald (2004), data- storage consists of "audio recordings,

field notes, and filing of hard copy documentation" (p.17). After every individual

interview, I listened to the recording and made notes and transcribed key words, phrases

and statements to ensure that the voices of the participants in the research were heard

(Groenewald, 2004). Each recording of the researcher's field notes were dated on the day

it was collected to ensure that it correlated with the data collection (Miles & Huberman,

1984). The transcribed interview and field notes were stored electronically. All files

were saved as a Microsoft Word document on the researcher's laptop and were protected

by a password. No one except the researcher has access to the transcribed interviews and

field notes that were saved in a Microsoft Word document.

 Framework for Augmenting Validity and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity refers to whether the findings of a study are true

and certain -"true" in the sense that the research findings accurately reflect the situation,

and "certain" in the context that research findings are supported by the evidence (Guion,

Diehl & McDonald, 2011). In addition, Creswell and Miller (2000) state that qualitative

researchers also apply various validation strategies to ensure trustworthiness and rigor in

studies. Trustworthiness is of paramount importance for any research study. Guba and

Lincoln (1994) stated that trustworthiness must be established to ensure ethical and fair

practices, and to ensure that the results truthfully represent the participants' actual experiences. Thus, the researcher used triangulation, thick description, peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity as validation strategies to establish trustworthiness (Royse, 2011).

Triangulation. Triangulation is a process used by qualitative researchers to check and to establish validity in their studies by analyzing a phenomenon from various perspectives (Neuman, 2006). In this study, the perspectives of both current minority students and graduates from undergraduate programs were analyzed. Thurmond (2001) posits that data triangulation is important for "increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem" (p. 254). The data were triangulated from interviews, and from reflective journal entries. In this context, triangulation was used to deepen the researcher's understanding of attrition barriers and the experiences of underrepresented minority students in PWI and to maximize her confidence in the findings. The researcher, being a social worker herself, provides a section at the end of this chapter describing her story as a social work educator and her standpoint as an underrepresented minority on the relevant issues as well as potential bias.

Thick description. Thick description provides an in-depth narrative of the phenomena being studied from the voices, actions, feelings, and meanings of the study participants. Thick description goes beyond surface appearances, the insignificant, and the humdrum (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the objective is not to question or interrogate the text, but to "let the text speak" (P. Ironside, June 17, 2014, personal communication).

The participants' voices are displayed under each theme to provide a detailed description for the individual interview. This in-depth description allows the participants' lived experiences to be uncovered as they pertain to attrition barriers and to the mechanisms used by the participants to become successful.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing has been heralded as an important aspect of the validation strategy in qualitative research studies (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) maintained that peer debriefing enhances "the credibility of a project" (p. 513). The researcher engaged in peer debriefing with three doctoral students and a graduate committee advisor who are familiar with qualitative data analysis. Hendricks (2006) stated that peer debriefing helps to emphasize correctness and truthfulness of research interpretations and conclusions, and guards against researcher bias. I am a member of the Research Gate, which allowed me to have discussion with world-renowned expert hermeneutic phenomenological researchers who have provided insightful information relating to conducting phenomenological studies. Research Gate is a network, which is dedicated to science and research, and it allows researchers to connect, and collaborate, and identify scientific publications. Ongoing discussion with Research Gate scholars has been instrumental in answering questions on the philosophical framework in hermeneutic methodology and its implications in phenomenology studies. In addition, to help better equip this researcher's ability to conduct the collection and data analysis in this study, the lessons learned from attending the Institute for Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology Methodology at the Indiana University School of Nursing during the summer of 2014 were used**.**

Reflexivity. Lastly, data were complemented by using a reflective journal/field notes. Reflexivity involves critical self-reflection by journaling the researcher's own reflections, concerns, and uncertainties during the study (Maschi & Youdin, 2012). The researcher's field notes served as the recording of what was heard, observed, experienced, and thought of during the data collection process (Groenewald, 2004). The journaling permitted the researcher to describe her frame of mind about the guiding research in this area of study. Groenewald cautioned that it is easy for researchers to be absorbed in the data-collection process and fail to reflect on the process. Thus, reflective journaling helped to add thoroughness to this qualitative inquiry as it helped this investigator to record her reactions, expectations, biases, and assumptions about the research process (Morrow & Smith, 2000). To demonstrate credibility, this researcher kept a detailed journal that documented the decision-making processes during the data collection and analysis stages. This documentation included thorough records to create an audit trail so that the steps that resulted in the final interpretations can be retraced. Consequently, field notes provided added data for the analysis process.

Human Subject Issues

In qualitative research, the researcher must be cognizant of the possibility of any human subject issues that may surface during the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2009). This study used a phenomenological approach and required in-depth interviews and questions that extracted meaning from participants' personal experiences. The researcher had an obligation to respect the participants' rights, values, and privacy. Researchers have to be aware of their own biases and the impact that their biases can potentially have on the researcher-participant relationship (Mehra, 2002).

With this awareness, the researcher was required to protect the participants throughout the research process by establishing trust with them, upholding the integrity of the research, and protecting against misconduct and any impoliteness that might reflect on their organizations or institutions (Creswell, 2009). In this study, human subject issues were addressed in two different ways: protection from the researcher's bias and ethical considerations. Consent forms addressed any risks, and permission from the IRB was secured to conduct this study.

Protection from Researcher Bias. Any inquiry that includes human participants necessitates an awareness of the ethical considerations that can occur from researcher-participant interactions. In considering the position of the researcher, it is important to communicate that this researcher has no direct association with the office of Diversity, Access, and Achievements at the focal university or its activities. In addition, this researcher has no role in the admission of potential students, nor does she have any power to exercise any impact over the process of admission. The possibility of participants feeling coerced to participate in this research because of the researcher's affiliation was unlikely. The researcher established and built the participants' trust in order to access more detailed and honest data from the interviews. Prior to any interview, the research protocol and purpose of this study was thoroughly explained to all participants in this study to avoid creating any discomfort for the participant.

Ethical Considerations. The importance of ensuring ethical considerations that respect the participants being studied in any qualitative study are critical (Gallant & Bliss, 2006). Permission was secured from the Institutional Review Board before the study begins to ensure that ethical considerations were met. Ethical consideration in research

studies is also necessary to protect participants by using informed consent and confidentiality to ensure participants' privacy (Royse, 2011). As such, ethical issues are equally important in hermeneutic phenomenology like any other research paradigms. The following three ethical standards were carried out in this study. To maintain firm adherence to the ethics as outlined by Creswell (2007): 1) clarifying the purpose and procedure of the research beforehand, 2) obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality by not disclosing the identities of participants, and 3) providing the participants with the option to obtain a copy of the research findings.

Accordingly, participants' confidentiality was upheld throughout the study. Although interview sessions were audiotaped, only the researcher had access to the audio data files, which were recorded and locked in a filing cabinet. Upon completion of this study, all the data was destroyed. Confidentiality was further ensured by not using identifiable information when transcribing the interviews. The researcher used pseudonyms to identify the participants and their university to ensure confidentiality.

The Role and Background of the Researcher

The researcher's role necessitated the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the inception of the study. In my assumption, these experiences augment my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to the issues being studied and assisted me in working with participants. McGregor and Murnane (2010) state, "There is a place for the voice and role of the researcher and participants in the study. Humans are central to the research process, rather than isolated from it" (p. 426). Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, my personal bias may shape the way my understandings and interpretations of the data collected.

Gadamer (1989) argues, "[during the interview process] does not mean that when we listen for someone…we must forget all our fore meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person" (p.268). The researcher recognized the need to be open to the thoughts and opinions of the participants.

The researcher, for this study, first felt passionate about the topic during her matriculation for her master's degree, while working as a supplemental instructor. Working as a supplemental instructor, I had a vantage point from which to observe that the students who attended study sessions were not necessarily the students who were academically challenged. Additionally, after deciding to conduct my master's thesis on the topic of academic assistance programs in higher education, and conducting a literature review on theory, which was being used to explain this phenomenon, my passion for the topic of retention and attrition increased exponentially. I was interested in understanding how learning occurs for different types of students in higher education.

As I prepared for my dissertation and reflected on my role as a budding social work educator and researcher, my concerns about barriers to learning became more evident. Several studies have looked at persistence disparities from a quantitative research perspective, without giving voice to those who live the experience. Until researchers have explored the lenses of qualitative research both locally and nationally on the topic of attrition among other students, it is difficult for us as educators to close the learning gap between students who graduate and those who do not. I have recognized the importance of conducting research on this understudied topic. Learning and overall

experience may not be the same for all students, thus an understanding of successful underrepresented minority students' experiences in higher education is needed.

As someone from a minority group based on my gender and ethnicity, I have some affiliation with the population being studied. As a minority student, I wanted to understand college students' persistence while others do not and what underlying mechanisms are at work in each instance. It is my hope that increasing our understanding of the experiences of minority students who succeed may inform and enhance the outcomes of those who struggle.

In this research study, the philosophical underpinning that guided my thinking has its influence in the Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition of qualitative inquiry. In keeping with Heideggerian thinking of threefold fore-structure in the hermeneutic circle, I acknowledge my background experience, knowledge, and values as part of the research interpretation. Consequently, I am aware of that my experiences may influence data analysis and interpretation.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important for the researcher to identify any preconceptions such as biases and values throughout the research process. As a minority female conducting an inquiry with minority participants, an awareness of my background is imperative. I am from an ethnic minority group and I earned an undergraduate degree from a PWI. In addition, some foreknowledge has been obtained from the literature, giving some insight from researchers who have studied attrition issues in previous studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the ways in which successful undergraduate underrepresented minority students managed to navigate barriers to their success at a predominantly white Midwestern university. Understanding the barriers faced by underrepresented minority students on such a campus, as well as knowing how these students navigated those barriers to ensure their success, may allow universities to distribute resources effectively to eliminate those barriers for students.

This chapter presents findings from interviews, which were conducted with 11 underrepresented minority students. Additionally, students' biographical information was analyzed and compared to the emerging themes generated from the in-depth interviews. All names included in this study, including that of the university's, are pseudonyms. Table 1 provides demographic information for the 11 study participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographics (n = 11)

Participant (*Pseudonym*)	First Generation (college *student*)	Year	Major	Gender	GPA	Ethnicity	Age
Jamie	Yes	Grad	Biology	F	3.5	African - American	26
Chinera	Yes	Grad	Public Health	F	3.41	African- American	24
Catelina	No	Junior	Psychology	F	4.0	Latino	25
Konye	Yes	Grad	Sociology	F	3.5	African- American	27
Frances	Yes	Senior	Anthropology	M	3.4	African- American	23
Ruth	Yes	Senior	Sociology	F	3.4	African- American	26
Rhianna	Yes	Senior	Inter-Studies	F	3.4	Latino	22
Gianna	Yes	Junior	Pre-Med	F	3.2	Latino	21
Milo	Yes	Junior	Philosophy	M	3.4	African- American	22
Bryan	Yes	Senior	Philosophy	M	4.0	African- American	27
Esther	Yes	Junior	Exercise Science	F	3.2	African- American	24

The guiding questions for this study were: 1) What barriers, if any, to student success have minority underrepresented students encountered? 2) What was necessary for students to overcome those barriers successfully? Several themes emerged from the text regarding barriers and strategies, which participants used to overcome those barriers.

The following six primary barriers were identified:

1. *Classroom Communication barriers*: Almost all of the participants in this study noted that classroom communication was one of their challenges. Participants' perception of their communication in the classroom and understanding of classroom terminologies pose significant barriers to their successes.

2. *Being a minority Barrier:* Participants shared some experiences of being underrepresented as a barrier to their success. Some participants explained their collegiate experience as challenged by stereotype. They described some of their experiences in the classroom and around the campus community as presenting challenges based on their underrepresented minority status.

3. *Academic stereotype threat barriers:* Participants felt that teachers and peers perceived them as they were inadequately prepared to succeed in college. Several participants felt that they were stereotyped academically because of the high school, which they attended. Participants also perceived that they were at a disadvantage for success in college because they came from high schools, which failed to provide adequate resources and preparation. Participants felt that they were perceived as not smart enough to handle college work. In addition, some participants felt that they did not exactly fit in the collegiate setting.

4. *Faculty relationship barriers:* Participants explained that they were not able to form good relationships with faculty members. Some felt that some faculty members' attitudes undermined their confidence to succeed. The lack of student-faculty relationship posed a barrier for some of the participants.

5. *Interaction and responsibilities:* Participants expressed inability to engage socially was a barrier. Some participants could not become socially engaged in the collegiate setting because of personal obligations and responsibilities. Others felt that they did not fit into the social arena on campus.

6. *Financial barriers:* Several participants identified a lack of financial resources as one of the challenges for degree completion. The inability to cover college tuition, books, and other expenses were stated as barriers even with the help of financial aid.

Participants also identified persistence factors and key support strategies that they used to overcome barriers to gain success in higher education. Participants also described their perception of an ideal campus. The following strategies were identified as factors supporting success:

1. *Familial Support:* Participants' responses showed that family support was a critical factor for their persistence and completion of their degree.

2. *Self-Concept:* Participants' competence was woven in their academic, personal, and familial aspirations.

3. *Persistence*: Participants' resilience, self-determination, and good work ethics towards the completion of their degree with the hope of obtaining a better life were identified as of importance.

4. *Student Interaction, engagement and involvement:* Participants stated that getting involved in student association and clubs was an important strategy for success.

5. *Networking:* Participants' ability to network with faculty members and other students provided resources and opportunities.

6. *Sense of Belonging:* Participants expressed feeling a part of the collegiate setting. Participants who established a good relationship with faculty members and the collegiate environment communicated that they felt that the university contributed to their academic well-being but that they also felt that they contributed to the university.

An Ideal Campus: Participants' primary suggestion of a model campus was that the college community must be all inclusive of all types of students. This includes increased multicultural opportunities to increase diversity in the classroom, and the collegial setting in general.

A presentation of six of the main barriers/themes identified and key support strategies used for success are presented and supported with the participants' responses for each of the findings. Themes will be discussed in the order of importance. As in phenomenological studies, the objective of this study was not to establish the severity of the barriers, which participants encountered but to display a wide range of experiences voiced by the participants in an attempt to provide rich, thick data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Quotations are used to demonstrate varying expression from multiple participant perspectives in an attempt to convey the intricacy of the barriers expressed by the participants. Recommendations for an ideal campus are also presented. Throughout this chapter, the data from both

undergraduate students and from former students who had received an undergraduate

degree were entwined together. A summary of the findings concludes chapter four.

Barriers to Success

Classroom Communication

> **Classroom Communication Barriers**. One of the primary findings of this study

is that underrepresented minority student's perception of their communication in the

classroom and the challenge of comprehending classroom terminologies pose significant

barriers to their success. Participants expressed their inability to understand the

language/terminologies used in the classroom by some professors creating a disadvantage

and challenge to their success. Participants perceived this challenge in their

academic/classroom vocabulary debility as not being smart and ill prepared.

> Sometimes it is hard to maybe, when I do not understand something it is
> hard sometimes to figure out what the professor is saying. I think that
> they find it hard to explain it in terms that I will understand. Like the
> language sometimes they used words as if I do not know what the words
> are, most people call it big vocabulary words or SAT words. Sometimes I
> say can you simplify it for me. They will take a deep breath and be like
> you're in college now you need to know this it isn't a high school
> class…but my White peers they get it, maybe because they used these
> words in their home, but this is a barrier when I am trying to work on a
> paper. (Jamie, an African American female).

> Another participant stated, "I felt uncomfortable with the way I speak just because

it's not as professional as it could be so when I would raise my hand and I would talk the

way I would normally talk and they would stare." (Frances, an African American

female).

> Well nobody ever raised their hand ever to ask the meaning of a word and
> I just did not want to be annoying to the class. But I just heard the rest of
> the sentences he had to say and I tried to make sense of it so I just kind of
> had an idea and then just um if anything I would just write it down how it
> sounded to me and then I would Google it and I would be like oh that's
> what it means (Rhianna, Latino female).

Frances (African American female) stated specific incidences of feeling discomfort with

the classroom vocabulary:

> Well, especially when they were coming from like good schools like
> private schools so they were like saying vocabulary words I've never
> heard of before and it was making me uncomfortable. When I speak
> sometimes, I know that I cannot broaden my vocabulary as wide as them
> so I do not talk I just listen. I do not know it just feels uncomfortable
> because I do not want them to think I am stupid just by what I'm saying.

Rhianna expressed her struggle with understanding the academic terminologies,

which were used in her classroom as a significant challenge:

> Well sometimes when I'm in the classroom I feel like I'm not smart
> enough because I'm like ugh…these vocabulary I guess because I didn't
> grow up in a household where these words were used. They are at some
> sort of advantage because of that and there were no books ever in my
> house and so I never really read ever, and it was hard. I didn't ever really
> read so some of the same challenges I find those challenges on a higher
> level. I mean I feel like some other people just know more vocabulary
> than I do.

Other participants described similar challenges with understanding terminologies

and concepts used in the classroom. Discontinuity between the professor's language and

underrepresented minority student's ability to grasp course content can also lead to

academic stereotype threat where participants perceived themselves as not smart. One of

the participants stated:

> When I would go in class, they would look at me to the point where if I
> had something to say I was scared to raise my hands. Just because people
> would stare let me listen to what she had to say, and it's like I've never
> felt Black before until they like made me notice it I guess. So with like
> the staring I'm like what are you looking at I was just asking a question,
> but they made me feel like I was stupid for asking a question just because
> I wasn't a part of their culture I guess, and the way I speak is different.
> (Frances, an African American female).

Konye an African American male felt that his lack of reading contributed to his inability to communicate effectively. He stated, "Although I speak proper English there have been challenges in my writing skills. Writing goes along with reading. I have never been a very strong reader."

Being a Minority Barriers

Participants described their experiences of being discriminated against or labeled in the collegiate setting. Participants identified experiences of being singled out by other students and faculty members. Participants described being an underrepresented minority as a barrier in various dimensions of their college experience. These experiences were linked to being underrepresented and female statuses.

Underrepresented Status

Most of the participants came from high schools which had a predominantly minority student population:

> My undergraduate at … was kind of a culture shock for most students because a lot of students from high school have been there or came from really small towns so I would hear things like you're the first Black person I have ever sat next to and that type of thing (Chinera, an African American female).

One participant commented on the sparse representation of minorities in the classroom. Ruth, an African American student shared, "sometimes I feel isolated in the classroom. In some classes there may be only four minority students in the class." Gianna, a Latino female student expressed a similar concern, "all the bigger lecture classes and you look around and see all these people fighting to succeed and there is not that many of you and you're only kind of thinking, that maybe this isn't for me." Another participant said, "I would have liked to see more minorities in the classrooms so

that I could feel more comfortable speaking and I wouldn't feel so nervous or scared to

speak my point of view" (Rhianna, Latino female). Ruth, an African American female,

felt that she needed to explain that colored people are intelligent:

> I was answering questions and I could see from the lab instructor and
> students responses of oh you are smart and I'm like everyone is smart. I
> have seen colored people that are smart and they can do everything. They
> just need the chance and the support and they need encouragement from
> the people from their environment that's what they need. So you cannot
> really judge skin color. I tell them no not everybody is the same, so that
> really comes to me and I am trying to tell people not everybody is the
> same.

> Milo described his frustration in understanding his identity as a college student

and being an underrepresented minority as it relates to his acceptance in a PWI:

> It is like being underrepresented minority and to bring that being my
> identity…how does that fall? How do I navigate that and make it my
> identity? So it is hard to navigate it because you are underrepresented,
> you are singled out with different people and faculty. I will go to a group
> of people and talk one way and then I will go to another group of people
> and talk a totally different way. It is hard to figure out your identity (Milo,
> an African American male).

> Ninety percent of the participants in this study are first generation college

students. Some participants felt judged for being from a first generation college student

background. Ruth shared, "My father is not educated and my mother is not educated, so I

can see how people judge us because our parents are not educated."

Gianna felt that some Latino students are singled out by their accent. She said,

> Well first off I think that the way that I speak helps me in a way because
> there are a lot of Latinos who have accents when they talk so they get
> stigmatized instantly. So the fact that I can speak the way that I do people
> can't tell by the accent in my voice and that helps me.

> **Female Status.** Some female participants feeling discriminated against because

they were females working with males in the collegiate setting. Chinera, an African

American student, pinpointed an instance of being ignored when working in a setting, which was predominantly male:

> I think being a female is like kind of a barrier itself. I'm participating in a research program and in the lab it is kind of they expect you to know everything already.
> Even if you are coming in as someone who doesn't know what's going on in the lab, it's all new. And um, actually, the mentor or the guy I was working with he will not even look at me in the face and talk to me. He will kind of talk to the other guy who was there and then turn to me and say am did you get that and continued on.
>
> Well simply because even though we have come very further along in time there is still a stigma that comes like she's a woman and she can do that or she can't do that or woman can't do that and on top of that because you are Latina, she doesn't know how to do that kind of thing. It's not just one label its two labels that get to you (Gianna, a Latino student).

Academic stereotype threat barriers

Participants felt that they were not perceived as being academically prepared for college course work. Some participants pinpointed their high school experience as a contributing factor; others felt that they are perceived as academically ill-prepared and that they did not fit in.

Under-prepared for college

> I went to … high school and it was known as one of the worst high schools ever so even when I came from there I would tell them yeah I graduated from… high school going straight into college. They would judge me and even now I say like yeah I went to …, they're like ugh did you? And they expect me to be this dumb girl and I'm like I'm not dumb, like not everyone that went there is dumb. It's just the circumstances weren't as good as the other schools (Frances, an African American female).

> At that school it was probably 98% African American, and that was rare for Indiana, Indianapolis especially, the other …schools were more diverse than that. I've probably seen two White people the whole time I was there, the rest were probably Mexican. So I feel a lot of the teachers they brought in weren't prepared for the students and they would give up really easily and even then some of the students had real problems they were going through, like no money, no food, like they had real problems.

So they weren't as into education as they could have been but that's understandable because they have family to worry about other things to worry about and if you don't have that background that some of the other schools have then you're not going to do as well. So the school has a high reputation of being bad but really it was just misunderstood opposed to anything and that's why whenever I tell someone I went to …high school they automatically judge me and they are like oh you went to... school and you went to college, and I said yeah I got lucky and I just had enough people to care about me to push me through. It doesn't mean like it was a bad experience, it might be where I came from in my freshman year (Frances, African American female).

Perceived as Academically Ill-prepared

Frances, an African American female, expressed her perceived intellectual inability in the classroom in general: In regards to her hesitance to ask questions in the classroom, Frances characterized this situation with feelings of inadequacy:

so with like the staring I'm like what are you looking at I was just asking a question. But they made me feel like I was stupid for asking a question just because I wasn't a part of their culture I guess, and the way I speak is different.

Rhianna (a Latino female) described her classroom attitude as "well I try to keep that to myself." She further states,

I still didn't feel comfortable telling people that I looked up the meaning of words because I didn't want to let them down and they would be like 'oh she's like dumb' or umm I didn't want to disappoint them that I wasn't smart enough.

Some participants felt that it was critical for them to be proven adequate to be recognized or acknowledged. Frances said "so I had to make sure that I was just as good as everyone else so that I can be seen by my professors as someone who takes this seriously if I needed help or anything." Rhianna felt pressured to meet the professor's expectations:

So a lot of the times I didn't talk to my professors that much but when I hit a low point that's when I would be like I need to talk to them and when I

would talk to them that's when I felt like I had a connection with them. I'm like ok I talked to them I cannot let them down. That's the worst thing, their expectation.

Stereotyped and Socially Misfit

Milo, an African American male stated:

> In the classroom may be not as much as the social. But the social there is a feeling of vulnerability and discouragement that comes from the social arena kind of carries over in the academic. So I feel kind of discouraged in my studies like I am not worthy or accepted in the classroom. Like maybe I can write a good essay, but I am not going to think that it is good because that discouraged feeling kind of transfers from the social to the academic.

Jamie expressed frustration in her response to strategies used to overcome barriers:

> There is no way to really overcome it you just kind of just deal with it you know really it's just they're kind of ignorant. To me I feel like I will always have that issue with people with both sides Black or White, people try to make fun of the way I speak directly or trying to use street slang with me. Instead of shaking my hand they give me the fist pound. You can shake my hand and I speak eloquently. I can speak like you for example.

Milo's response was almost as if he felt a sense of entrapment:

> I do not feel like I can take refuge in anyone. When I cannot identify with anyone, I withdraw. I feel shame, I feel like I am not worthy. I feel vulnerable so I do feel vulnerable because I am unwilling to go out and take risks. I feel like I cannot go out and pursue certain things because I do not feel like I will be able to connect with the people involved. I feel like I am not worthy of it. So it affects my success because it makes me feel discouraged. I do not feel like I will be supported.

He felt that an inability to fit in socially was a barrier. In response to a question about what barriers Milo stated, "The barrier will be lack of identification but because I do not feel accepted."

Faculty Relationship Barriers

Participants expressed that the lack of faculty- student relationships served as a

barrier to success. The discontinuity occurs with how faculty relates to students and how

students relate to faculty members. Milo, an African American male said:

> Also, to make connections with faculty members who can help me to
> succeed academically. So I am kind of reserved and unwilling to make
> those connections. So it affects my ability to succeed in my degree
> because I feel like I am on an island alone trying to handle it. So it makes
> it hard because I do not feel like I can get the help, so it makes me get
> discouraged. So it affects my ability to succeed because I feel like it is
> just me trying to succeed. So it makes me feel defeated. A lot of times I
> do not want to even try. So that is probably the biggest way that it affects
> me.

Milo said, "even if a professor supports me I kind of feel that they have some kind

of ulterior motive or they have their own personal gain, so they are not really supporting

me." Another participant, Jamie, an African American, described her biggest challenge

as:

> It will definitely be trying to have a relationship with the professors…
> umm on both campuses I do feel that they, the professors, look at you kind
> of almost as a charity case. If they do kind of take an interest in you they
> always want to ask about my background because they assume that I come
> from a lower educated family or a lower income household.

Gianna felt that some professors undermine the student's confidence to succeed:

> I don't feel like I know. A lot of my teachers in my important classes
> would say 'well a lot of you will fail and a lot of you will drop out. It's
> going to be hard you might want to think about dropping out now because
> this is what it's going to be consisting of. And so that scares someone and
> that's like if I'm already going to fail why try if I'm already going to fail
> then you obviously won't help me succeed, and that's what keeps on
> going through your mind when you think about it. It's interesting because
> it's mostly for the classes that really count for your major particularly for
> me like you know there was one time when I was sitting it was when we
> did orientation and it was for…when they had us go in with a whole bunch
> of …and had us go into the …department and it's not even a real class

they just tell us what goes on in this department, and the person was explaining 'half of you guys will drop out. Half of you guys won't want to be here, it is hard work it's tough.' They say this and then they're like we have all these resources. So you're like if half of these people are going to drop out and there is all these resources how is that going to help me then. So you think that everything that is there for you isn't going to help you so how are you going to succeed and it has happened a few times not just in an orientation setting but also in the classroom setting.

Gianna felt that the university should intervene in how faculty members introduce course subject:

> A suggestion I would make to the university would be, making sure certain faculty members especially in the bigger classroom sizes and the more important classes, like chemistry and biology and other majors the way that they introduce the subject to make it a bit more positive. Students are already going in there feeling a little put back by the fact that this is university. You are in the real world and to come into a classroom and you hear that you automatically going to fail.

Interaction and Responsibilities

Participants expressed their challenges with social interaction in the collegiate environment as a barrier which hindered collaboration with other students. One participant said:

> I felt like I needed more time studying because it is the truth, it's so much harder, and I felt like I needed to spend more time there than developing relationships or getting involved in this or that. I just wanted to go to classes and go home. I think for me I just wanted to get on campus to go to class and go home if I was to be quite honest I didn't want to be involved. This is not high school I didn't want to put in so much time in clubs and organizations because I feel like high school you do that so it looks good but I feel that in college they have different leadership roles (Ruth, an African American student).

Lack of Social Interaction

Jamie felt that it was a challenge to interact and to communicate with some Students:

> She said that, the hardest thing is to trying to overcome that stereotype, with a lot of white students and like they feel like when they speak to you they have to use words like how professors do it too, it's just a struggle.

So the fact that I didn't choose to be social it kept me off campus and it took away connections I could have had with people and could have helped me or themselves. If I build that relationship with people I would have felt more comfortable getting help from someone that was a friend and associate rather than a professional. So I think that lack of social involvement did affect my ability to network.

Financial Barriers

Some participants identified lack of financial resources as a barrier to success. Participants listed lack of information on financial aid opportunities as a barrier and others stated that insufficient financial aid was a challenge to degree completion.

Lack of Financial Aid Information

As I am sure you are familiar not everyone is familiar, especially nontraditional students not everyone is familiar with the college process and who to talk to about what, how to start an organization, how to join an organization, what is required and things like that so often times at administrative levels or even at the faculty level, students are not being made aware of the opportunities, scholarships are going year to year undistributed because people aren't applying because they don't know (Bryan, an African American male).

Insufficient Financial Resources

Bryan (an African American male) expressed his disappointment with insufficient financial aid: "I had fallen back on student loans as a sort of crutch."

I would say this semester is one of the biggest barriers I've faced because of money so my financial aid ran out and my parents had to turn in this form that showed that it did run out and the school like yesterday told me I had to pay $1000 by the 19th, and I'm like I could pay $1000 if you would give me more than two weeks to pay it, even if it was at the end. So that's one of the biggest barriers I'm like ok I don't want to not graduate my last semester because of money, like that's not fair when I worked so hard, so that's one of the biggest barriers, other than that, everything has gone my way (Frances, African American female).

Bryan identified one of his primary barriers to success as significant financial debt that he has incurred during his undergraduate matriculation. He said, "I mean again I have taken out considerable student loans and despite some people's projection to maybe

hold off on education and go back to work a lot more to pay some of that off its my

detriment." Frances did not feel that FASFA provided sufficient financial assistance to

cover her college expenses. She said:

> …they definitely don't give you as much financial aid. Because school is
> so expensive for no reason really. Books are like $500. I'm not buying a
> book that's $500. It's more than school itself; it's the other things that
> come with it.

> I know some people that have to take time off to go to work and all that
> sort of stuff, they might not necessarily drop out but they do prolong their
> experience but even again here... I know many people who have quit
> because of their financial situation having to pay out of pocket (Bryan, an
> African American male).

Key Support and Solutions for Success

Eight participants in this study were either in their junior or senior year of their

undergraduate matriculation. Three other participants had completed an undergraduate

degree within the last five years. All the participants had a GPA of 3.0 or above. Most

research studies have confirmed that the highest attrition rate in higher education occurs

in the first and second year of undergraduate matriculation. In this sense, all the

participants were considered successful in their academic pursuit and to have been able to

navigate attrition barriers. With this in mind, participants were asked to delineate key

supports and strategies they used to overcome attrition barriers.

Resilience/Persistence

"Just as long as you know your opportunities, what you want, and how to get

there then you have the ability, the ambition, and the drive." (Bryan, an African

American male).

> I'm not sure if I would have experienced that broad of a network of people
> upon which I could rely to talk about our similar challenges and sort of
> find solace…the fact that I wasn't alone going through the same thing but,
> all in all, if you don't have a personal dedication, conviction, and

commitment to your education to know where you want to go and to know that you want this, then it's going to be challenging for people to want to stay and to see the value of what they are committing to. (Bryan, an African American male).

To be successful you have to look at that goal and then keep that focus on that goal and trust yourself and do it for yourself. Determination has changed my life. What my parents went through I don't want to go through what they went through. I want to have a better life, a better life for my kids and I want to make a difference so that if I am educated, I can help people, encourage people, motivate people because one of my goals is to help people, people that are like poor or orphans, people that are in need so in order to get that goal I need to be educated. I need to know what's going on so I can help people. I want to have a better life, better future, and help people because that is my goal. That has kept me more motivated. (Ruth is an African American female).

Resilience and Good Work Ethics

Milo, an African America male discussed strategies, which he used when he feels

challenged:

The resilience factor is that there is a future; the fact that I will not always feel like I do not belong. Maybe if I keep working hard I will get through all the academics. I need to get through all the studies and I will get to the other side. Just embracing the fact that I am an underrepresented minority and then realizing that these barriers and challenges of discouragement will not last forever. Maybe if I keep trying and keep working, I will get through (Milo, an African American male).

Bryan, an African American male shared his positive work ethics as a

strategy/solution and throughout to overcome his academic challenges:

Just a little bit of naivety I have a long term goal and like so academia is, I consider myself a mental athlete and my academia is like my field I want to do it. I'm here and I want to work through it and if I get a bad grade I'm going to work even harder put a lot of time into it, suffer through it, a lot of mental aversion and so I'm really committed to academia.

Well I consider myself intelligent, quite intelligent, I'm aware of that however it has taken a lot of work to get to the level of knowledge that I have and academic success. So math my gosh I had to devote to that, psychology I had to devote time to it, I'm really committed to learning this stuff and that's one of the issues I know people don't have the time to do that kind of stuff especially in math specifically as you remember.

I wasn't able to get into a full 4 year public university because I didn't have a rigorous enough math and taking 3 class placements and people said that certain races or minorities aren't good at certain subjects. I know math is one of them, but it takes a lot of work (Bryan, an African American male).

Cantelina, a Latino student, explained that it was important for her to work hard:

I feel like I have to work twice as hard; I feel like I have to push through it harder because of what they said I want to show that I can contribute. I work hard. I feel like when I am competent like I get around more adults, like my mentor and others would say good job. I feel like when I work harder I am rewarded. Overall, it is more rewarding to me.

Chinera shared that she was able to receive…because of her hard work. She say I didn't know anything about the … and I signed up for it… Like I got a lot of great things from it and I think that the reason why I was eligible for it was because I got good grades…work hard it will pays off.

Becoming Engaged in the Campus Community

Participants expressed the need to become involved in the campus community as a solution for success:

I'm a student here and I'm curious and I want to get my degree and get involved so to the extent that they push that periphery and just focus on why they are here and be curious enough to wander the halls, get to know people, to get involved if they can. I would say shift your focus from that sort of stuff to what you want and why you are here and the opportunities that are available to you (Bryan, an African American male).

It's more about I'm here to learn so I want to capitalize on that opportunity so I'm going to ask, I'm going to stand up, I'm going to raise my hand and question the content of the book, question the statements of the instructor. It's a little bit of that confidence there and intellectual curiosity (Bryan, African American male).

Self-Concept

Participants discussed how their confidence and self-concept increased as they conceptualized that they were able to overcome barriers and be successful. Participants linked their confidence in their academic performances to their self-concept.

It makes me feel proud of myself and also it is a big responsibility. I cannot predict the future but I am also doing my best right now but if something goes wrong I am not going to disappoint them and I'm always trying to make them happy but then at the same time I don't want to tell them what is going on at school because they are going to say something or may not feel good about it. (Ruth, an African American).

Frances felt very confident when she started to understand the course content.

She says,

It is intimidating just because I'm uncomfortable speaking but now I understand everything that they are talking about it's not like oh I have lower education than you, it's like no we are on equal playing ground right now so it feels good. I haven't had below like a 3.3. I've been on the dean's list three times.

Cantelina associated her self-concept with her academic performance. She said,

I think…well it will be different for everybody but... I mean I feel like I have confidence that I can do it and I make good grades…that give me the confidence. Jamie said "After going to my junior senior year I felt more accepted. My grades were good and I felt like I had proved myself. That made me felt good about myself.

Participants connected their self-evaluation on how well their academic ability is in

comparison to their classmates.

Familial Support

Almost all of the participants voiced familial support in the form of financial,

moral, or otherwise as an important aspect of their successful matriculation. One

participant acknowledged the importance of familial support for success. Ruth, an

African American stated:

I feel great. I feel I have come a long way and it's because of my family. My mom she believed in me she said you know you can do this. I live with my family they support me and when I ask for money they give it to me.

I am also going to school for me but also my family is waiting for me to be that great daughter the one who graduate you know. Like yes when you graduate we are going to get this house so I feel like yes she is waiting on me financially to support her as she supported me to and that is what I

want to do when I graduate and get a better job so that I can support her
and myself you know (Ruth an African American).

Ruth did not feel that all students have this type of support:

> But I feel like a lot of students are struggling. They are out of their family
> they are renting there house, they are trying to work to get money to pay
> for rent or anything and then trying to go school so that is overwhelming
> for them trying to keep GPA trying to make money so that they can
> survive you know I think that families play a big role.

Cantelina also felt that not everyone may have the support from their parents or

family. She said, "Both my parents have college degrees and they have good jobs and

they provide support for me. I know that not everybody has the same parents, which I

have to help them if they need it just realizing that."

Milo, an African American male, also shared that his familial support was his

main support:

> This is one of 'my biggest thing' support. They are so supportive. More
> than anything else, they will always support me, they are always
> supporting me: sometimes I do not even have to ask. Really, they are the
> biggest support. They really support me. They are the only people that I
> know are really or truly supporting me.

Rhianna said:

> We are not wealthy but my mom works really hard. She is always like
> telling us to do well. She does not have a degree or anything but she
> encourages us to do well at school. I want to make her proud of me.

Gianna discussed familial support as important and consistent in her undergraduate

pursuit:

> Family support is so helpful. I definitely feel that way. My grandmother
> was a very strong woman. She faced a lot of opposition in life but she
> always pushed all the females in the family to make sure you get an
> education. I have strong support from my family. They encouraged me to
> do better and when you see people like yourself… who may not have the
> opportunity you have. They getting pregnant and doing different things
> and you want to do better not just for yourself, but for them too. You want
> to be able to say … I saw that and I can and should do better. So, yes with
> all the strong women in my family --they may not all be educated-- but

they all encourage and support each other to be something in life and its very important not just as a minority but as a minority woman.

Social Interaction

Participants identified the importance of social interaction, engagement, and involvement on campus. Some participants' involvement in ethnic and cultural organizations and associations provided opportunities and mentorship. Rhianna communicated that a student association that she got involved with during her freshman year was very instrumental in helping her undergraduate pursuits:

> Well, I've had the best experience here at [this university] just because they took me in they provided so much support. I received an email that was like 'Oh call out for Latino student association' and I was like cool I don't really have much to do so I went out and they took me right away. They didn't let me go and the advisor was there for the Latino student association so I was like cool.

> I think it's really important for people to get involved in that level you can just go get your degree and go to campus go to class then leave which many people do because they have personal obligations but personal preference is to lead them towards that direction. I mean getting involved in an organization has been on par with if not greater than my experience academically throughout my whole college career in terms of what has benefited me in a whole host of things. (Bryan, an African American male).

Mentorship/ Networking

Ruth established a mentoring relationship with someone who was an expert in his field. She said:

> he would come with me and work with me and I would go into the coffee shop then ask him ok look I don't understand this…. And he would explain and make things easier for me and he was like my friend and like mentor.

> In one of my class my professors said that he did not care about or judge anyone by their skin color or their race. He wanted everyone to feel comfortable that their opinions and perspectives are valuable. This made me want to engage more in the class because he cared about my contribution. He did not think that I was dumb because I am Black. I

wish more professors made us feel accepted and welcomed in the classroom. (Ruth, an African American female).

I've been a lot more involved in student life…So it makes it a lot easier to keep going if you have that back up that support then you have no choice. I think last semester my professor was like what are you doing like where are you? I'm like they actually care it's not like ok well I guess she's not here I'm like are you alright I'm like yeah I'm ok. It's a lot easier when you have that as opposed to a situation where nobody knows your name. (Frances, an African American female).

I found professors that I have found a connection with or felt any comfortable connection it doesn't have to be I always feel comfortable with something that connects us without me having to sacrifice who I am, then I felt good and could get in touch with that teacher email them or talk to them when I have some academic issues (Gianna, a Latino student).

Sense of Belonging

Bryan, an African American male, felt a very strong allegiance to the university. He declared:

I walk through all the halls of pretty much any campus I'm part of, I want to get to know the people and the faculties and the availabilities here at… I really feel as though I am allowed to go. I think the curiosity; I felt a sense of ownership. He further expressed his sense of belonging and said, I felt that I am contributing to this institution as much as it is contributing to me.

Gianna felt that it is important for students similar to her to feel like they are a part of the collegiate setting. She expressed the need to have opportunities to feel a sense of belonging through involvement. Gianna said it, "was more accommodating to me when there was more for me to be able to get involved and when I say me I mean people like me as well, umm, just being able to have more things to feel a part of and not be excluded.

Characteristics of an Ideal Campus

Participants identified features of an ideal college campus to be all-inclusive and welcoming to all students. Participants ascertained that the model campus is

representative of programs that include multicultural student opportunities. Although

participants highlighted that an ideal campus must cater to a multicultural approach,

participants pointed out that some minority programs and organizations are poorly funded

affecting the quality of assistance, which can be provided. Cantelina expressed

disappointment,

> Umm the programs for underrepresented minority students needs to be
> more organized…and I do not know that... like if there isn't enough
> funding that it trickles down. Like the lack of funding prevents the quality
> of resources…does that make sense?

> Gianna, a Latino female student, described her ideal campus more specifically by

highlighting how multiculturalism should be a part of the collegiate setting:

> The ideal campus would have more a mixture of faculty members from
> different racial and cultural backgrounds, umm and they would give the
> faculty member liberty to be who they are... to expose their culture more. I
> mean a little bit more minorities being in positions that you wouldn't
> normally see them being in, like being the dean of an department or even
> teaching computer science or electrical engineering or science that type of
> thing, it doesn't necessarily have to be all minorities but just the blend of
> it, to see someone who is in pre –med, nursing, computer science, with
> similarities to me and who looks like me.

Ruth felt that the ideal campus must be all-inclusive and welcoming:

> I am a very social person I like to talk, laugh, so maybe you know a
> welcoming campus for everybody to different people different background
> you know doesn't matter how you look what you think your color is. I
> just want a welcoming and the students I want them to be welcoming.

Bryan felt that the current university characterizes an ideal university:

> it is a larger institution here students have access to more resources and
> more funding for their projects because of the larger pool of students from
> which they extract a certain fraction of their cost and put it in funds for
> student organizations. So there are a lot more opportunities to capitalize on
> here.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the ways in which successful undergraduate and graduate underrepresented minority students managed to navigate barriers to their success at a Midwestern predominantly white university. Gaining an understanding of the barriers encountered by underrepresented minority students and how they overcame those barriers to achieve their success, can lead to mechanisms, which can prevent or reduce attrition among this population.

This chapter presented findings from interviews consisting of current undergraduate and graduate underrepresented minority students. Transcription of themes was categorized as barriers to overcome or key support solutions used by the participants to overcome barriers. Direct quotes from the text were presented illustrating the participants' voices from the interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A phenomenological lens was used to articulate the lived experiences of underrepresented minority students. In-depth interviews were conducted with eleven underrepresented minority students at a Midwestern PWI to learn from their stories what factors aided in their matriculation, despite challenges. This chapter presents a discussion, conclusion, and recommendations. Following is a presentation of study limitations and implications for practice and future studies.

Discussion

Underrepresented minority students enter higher education with an enthusiasm to succeed. Then, somewhere between admission and completion, certain factors seem to impede or support their success. Herein lays an explanation for their retention and persistence. Studies have focused on figures to illustrate college successes and failures but rarely have they told the story or lived experiences of underrepresented minorities. Higher education in particular has not paid much attention to the underlying struggles of vulnerable students who succeed. The conundrum is not in recruitment of underrepresented minority students, as enrollments for 2009-2011 have increased (Education Trust, 2015; Mettler, 2014) startlingly, but in that graduation rates do not correlate with the increased enrollments for this population.

Study participants identified barriers and reflected upon factors contributing to attrition. They expressed how these barriers, positive and negative, influenced their matriculation.

In fact, they voiced that they lacked academic preparation for college and now, as a minority in a PWI, experienced academic stereotype threat. They felt they were often singled out because they were from a minority group. Their need to be engaged with the faculty was stressed as an important factor. One participant in particular highlighted the absence of a faculty-student relationship as a barrier to success. From the literature, we know faculty messages are important to minority students as they are interpreted as interpersonal validation versus academic messages (Hurtado et al., 2012). Throughout the interview process students articulated resilience that were evidenced through identified strategies and solutions used in overcoming the odds to navigate and persist.

Conclusions

Herein the theme-drawing conclusions are shared in three categories:

(1) Participants perceived barriers to graduation, ie., what leads to attrition;

(2) Participants' expressed strategies used to overcome barriers and support, solutions, and strategies; and

(3) Participants' perception of the characteristics of an ideal university.

To overcome barriers and challenges in their academic pursuits, participants enlisted various forms of support, solutions, and strategies to complete an undergraduate degree. Many, if not all of these supports, helped them display high levels of self- determination and persistence, which reflected resilience and work ethic.

Barriers to Graduation - What Leads to Attrition

Some participants reported having to work twice as hard as their peers to accomplish the same goals. Other students reported that being in college prompted an awareness that their high school experiences were inadequate and the playing field was not even. They felt ill prepared for college. Others described their unwillingness to ask questions or to speak in their classes for fear of being perceived as "not smart enough" or "dumb." As a result, unlike in previous studies (Padilla, 2009; Walpole, 2007), the participants identified experiences of stereotyped threat.

Other participants also expressed frustration with their struggle to grasp course content. They identified language barriers as adding to challenges to understand vocabulary words and concepts used by professors in the classroom. Their inability to comprehend the classroom lecture and discussion also fueled their academic and psychological distress. Without the academic language skills, students were not able to fully participate in classroom discussion. This indirectly excluded them from the academic arena in the classroom. Participants perceived some of these barriers were simply because of their minority status. This was evidenced even more when they saw no other minority students in many of their classes, and they felt they were not accepted in other groups.

Some voiced their lack of interaction, engagement, and involvement in the collegiate setting as a barrier. Beyond feeling lost in the classroom, many expressed feeling like a social misfit: not being able to find their identity in the collegiate setting. Participants communicated that because of personal responsibilities, their ability to interact or to be involved in college activities was impeded.

This suggests that personal factors in engagement limit the opportunities for students to become integrated in the collegiate setting, an important aspect for optimal student learning. Lack of faculty-student relationships was also noted as a barrier. Expressed lack of trust prevented many of the students from forming a good faculty-student relationship. Participants voiced that faculty often undermined students' confidence by announcing, at the start of the semester, that many in the room will drop out or not pass the course. Participants felt that the announcement connoted that students were not competent or not welcomed in the class.

Almost all of the participants in this study were first generation college students. They identified financial resources as a barrier for degree completion. Additionally, they identified incidences when lack of financial resources challenged their matriculation and that of similar students in their minority status. Financial aid was sometimes insufficient to meet their college expenses, and although most received aid and loans, this was not enough to cover all of the expenses associated with their degree pursuit.

Strategies used to Overcome Barriers

Talking with the students about their experiences and learning how they navigated to successful degree completion was powerful. As a result, it was essential that strategies they used to be successful were drawn from the study findings to increase our knowledge and to inform other students. The participants' resilience and thriving attitudes served as solutions, as postulated by Henry and Milstein (2004). Henry et al. claim that resiliency refers to "the ability to bounce back from adversity, learn new skills, develop creative ways of coping, and become stronger" (p. 7).

Participants in this study provided insight into the strategies they have used to overcome the challenges they encountered and, to some extent, the challenges they may have brought to the university, illustrating their level of resiliency.

Strategies

Several strategies were identified from the interviews. First, students expressed persistency, determination, and the recognition of the importance of degree completion as critical. They suggested that degree completion was a necessity because it offered the hope of obtaining a better life. These factors alone speak to the motivation for student success beyond academics. For instance, students voiced having a positive self-concept as a critical component of their success.

Second, participants identified family and family supports as important. All participants voiced that familial support was a pivotal factor in their degree completion. They reported that family provided financial resources, a sense of encouragement, and a sense of obligation to complete their degree because of their families' expectations. Some voiced that family support should be encouraged among the underrepresented minority community. This was consistent to some extent with other studies that found that first generation students, although pressured, were motivated to be the first to graduate and to break the vicious cycle by obtaining a college degree (e.g., Ishitani, 2006; Warburton et al., 2001).

Third, social, and academic interaction in the collegiate setting was another strategy for success. Participants voiced that being involved in student associations and clubs improved their levels of engagement and involvement in both academic and social discussions.

Participants suggested they should not only pass through higher education institutions, but they should allow the higher education experience to have an overall impact on their lives. This was also true for their engagement and attempts to network. Some participants suggested that students should not stay in their comfort zone but strive to develop a network as this can aid in finding solutions to support their success. Participants shared that their ability to integrate in the collegiate setting helped them gain a sense of belonging and assisted in their successes. They added that they not only received an education from the university, but that they contributed to the university. In this sense, successful students felt vested in the collegiate setting, which heightened their sense of belonging. Ultimately, participants' efforts to make connections with faculty members and with other students can be an avenue to explore resources and opportunities to enhance their success.

In response to the identified barriers, participants succeeded because of their commitment to their goal of graduating and having a better life. They achieved this success through sheer determination and a good work ethic, using familial support, positive self-concept, networking, and social interaction to reinforce completion of their degree and graduation.

Characteristics of an Ideal University

Participants' recommendations for an ideal campus included an all-inclusive campus and multicultural programs able and willing to accommodate all types of students. Participants suggested that there should be additional multicultural opportunities for an increasingly diverse student population and diverse faculty.

An ideal campus is all-inclusive and offers multicultural pedagogy and policies that address both the academic and social well-being of all students. Participants in this study shared an ideal campus that should be welcoming to diversity where all students feel welcomed. This ideal suggests the need for more multicultural programs and policies. Schreiner (2013) pointed out that mere involvement and engagement is not enough: involvement in meaningful and rewarding activities, which embrace the contribution of all students, leads to success in the learning community. Museus (2010) endorsed the importance of racial and ethnic minority student organizations for underrepresented minority students in higher education to function in culturally safe spaces.

In the general sense, multicultural programs provide cultural familiarity, opportunities for encouragement, and sources of validation for underrepresented minority college students. There is an increasing need to promote and to increase multiculturalism in higher education policies and programs, not only through admissions (Espenshade & Radford, 2009), but from enrollment to graduation.

Although the Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorizations have effectively increased minority access in higher education, the effects of these acts are not without contention (Libertella, Sora, & Samuel, 2007). Additionally, the philosophical stance of Affirmative Action policy sought to rectify perceived historical disparities against individuals of a particular gender, race, religion, or infirmity (Citrin et al., 2001). Accordingly, studies have confirmed that Affirmative Action programs have been responsible for successfully providing large numbers of underrepresented minority students, particularly African Americans and Latinos, with acceptance in selective universities (e.g., Charleston, 2009).

With efforts used to reduce disparity by reserving a stipulated percentage of access, college enrollments for minority students increased. Universities saw a large increase in minority student admissions because of these and other similar programs.

With an increase in minority college enrollment, factors relating to the lack of financial aid grants and the multicultural relativism clauses in federal policy are required to address the complex problems that subsequently emerged. In addition, policy makers and university administrators have not fully grappled with or conceptualized the impact of effectively retaining and graduating this emerging diverse student population. While programs and policies were effective in providing underrepresented minority students' access, they were limited in their ability to increase retention rates. Hu and Kuh (2003) argued that it was not enough to throw together a diverse group of undergraduates and expect interracial interaction to occur automatically. In this sense, access alone does not equate to academic and social engagement on the three critical levels: with faculty, in the classroom, and in the collegiate community. This study shows that underrepresented minority students may experience alienation in all three levels in the collegiate setting. University policies do not address the lack of multiculturalism; the policies merely provide opportunities for access, not necessarily ways to maximize multicultural pedagogy.

University administrators cannot assume that admitting minority students in PWIs alone will create an environment conducive for success. Participants in this study described the characteristics of an ideal university as one that is welcoming to diverse students. To create an all-inclusive learning environment, policies are needed that foster collegiate settings where all types of students feel welcomed and are embraced.

Dugan, Kodama, and Gebhardt (2012) posit that "the adoption of a 'one size fits all' approach to leadership development may actually be dangerous as some dimensions of the college environment that are positive for one group of students emerged as negative for other groups" (p. 184). For example, some barriers identified by participants in this study were stated as classroom occurrences. Given that these students represent characteristics and backgrounds that differ from the predominant student population, it is necessary to consider ways to enhance learning to benefit all learners. An important insight from this study indicates a need to re-structure classroom communication to be tailored to accommodate the needs of all students. Although this university provides ethnic enclaves (e.g., Latino Students Association) as a means of providing a place for minority students where students similar to them congregate, this is outside of the classroom and does not account for isolation within the classroom. In this sense, these enclaves may serve to help socialize and to develop minority students' racial/ethnic identity, whereas to offer more welcoming classrooms, incorporating multicultural pedagogy, will enhance learning for all students.

Weir (2001) argued that higher education institutions that are racially diverse play a central role in preparing students for meaningful participation in democracy. Weir further noted that students educated in multicultural settings are motivated and equipped to participate in a multifaceted and increasingly heterogeneous society. Without opportunities to embody their cultural and racial identities, minority students are more likely to feel compelled to assimilate to be accepted or to feel alienated in the collegiate setting.

Dugan et al. (2012) contend, "It becomes the responsibility of educators to understand the unique educational climate at their institution and the differing experiences of students from various racial groups within that climate as well as to design programs that address these considerations" (p. 184). Evidently, the need for multiculturalism is relative in promoting an ideal collegiate setting, as suggested by the participants in the current study.

Study Strengths and Limitations

There are several strengths in this study, including the design of the study and the timing of the study. One strength is the use of a phenomenological design. The use of open-ended questions in this study to collect data through in-depth interviews was relevant to provide an opportunity to explore the participants' perspectives. The Access to Success Initiative (AS2), a project of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and The Education Trust, has a 2015 deadline for increasing graduation rates for low-income and minority students nationwide. Higher education institutes are at a critical point in determining what needs to be included through the AS2 to better retain and to close the graduation gap between non-minority college students and underrepresented minority students. With the AS2 timeframe of 2015, findings from this study offer knowledge of underrepresented minority students' perceptions of barriers encountered and strategies used to overcome barriers, helping to close the completion gaps for minority students in higher education.

There are some limitations to this study. First, the study was limited to two underrepresented minority groups, African American and Latino students. However, there are other groups that are considered underrepresented minority students.

Second, the study focused on a small number of underrepresented minority students (n

=11). Third, a limitation of this study includes its focus on one PWI in one Midwestern

state. With such a small, self-selected sample, findings can be considered suggestive but

not conclusive. Also, the participants for this study were not represented by an equal

number of graduate and undergraduate students or males or females: there were only

three graduate students and only three males. The present study was undertaken only in

one state; therefore, the results are not generalizable throughout the U.S.

As underrepresented minority students strive to complete undergraduate degrees,

their advancement and retention continue to raise concerns for policy makers and

university administrators. More importantly, the significance of attrition factors among

underrepresented minority students has proven to be complex. In this study, findings

indicate that underrepresented minority students encounter barriers and experiences

related to classroom communication, psychological dissonance, limited financial

resources, perceived minority linked status, academic stereotype threat, and faculty-

student relationships. The findings also pinpointed strategies, solutions, and supports that

successful underrepresented minority students used to navigate barriers in higher

education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

There has been continued demand for increased retention of underrepresented

minority students in higher education; thus, interventions and models promoting

resiliency leading to successful degree completion are warranted. By using Heidegger's

phenomenological approach, this study contributed to an in-depth ontological

understanding of the human experience of underrepresented undergraduate minority students. Smith and Osborn (2003) set forth the importance of understanding the general human experiences in phenomenon "what it is like, from the point of view of the participants" (p. 51). More specifically, "we gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

Implications for Practice

One of the main barriers identified by participants affecting their inability to understand faculty members' classroom language was classroom communication. Participants discussed the challenges in understanding terms and concepts used by faculty members as a common barrier to comprehending coursework. Faculty members in the classroom represent critical resources for underrepresented minority students to enhance their self-competence in higher education. This finding offers new insight for best practices for faculty members to improve their method of delivering lectures in a classroom setting. For students, classroom communication is the most significant point of learning in higher education. If faculty members assigned a list of new academic language, concepts, and terminologies online as required graded assignments to be completed before the lecture or topic was introduced, underrepresented minority and other students would be better acquainted with the language before the lesson was introduced in the classroom. Underrepresented minority students can engage in classroom discussions when they know the language. The classroom is the place or community of learning exchange, which provides students with a sense of confidence and validation of their intellectual force.

For students whose communication is impeded because of unfamiliar language and concepts, learning can be a major challenge. The findings from this study offer additional understanding of how academic language use in the classroom can lead to psychological distress. Students are more likely to feel devalued and isolated when they are not able to actively understand or participate in the classroom dialogue. The challenge for underrepresented minority students to tap into classroom communication skills to accomplish learning that is required for intellectual competence is a noted barrier in this study.

Findings in this study indicate that the perceptions that underrepresented minority students have of their competence and the perceptions that they felt faculty members and peers had of them served as barriers to success. Participants expressed that the message sent by some faculty members--announcing at the start of the semester that many students will drop out of the course--undermined their confidence. One Latina participant, after hearing the faculty members' announcement, said she felt "what was the use of trying" if it were already predicted that she would drop out. Underrepresented minority students who are the first generation in their family to make it to college can feel pressured to do well and succeed. The irony is that underrepresented minority students do not only feel pressured because they may internalize feeling inadequately prepared, but they also observe that they are in the minority in the classroom. Any derisive perception can disrupt underrepresented minority students' academic efforts by limiting their participation and diminishing their self-confidence, ultimately leading to attrition.

This study can begin to fill the gap in helping faculty members to understand underrepresented minority students' perception of the barriers that they encounter in the

classroom because, knowing underrepresented minority students' perceptions and anxieties, faculty members can motivate underrepresented minority students in classroom learning. This suggests faculty members become more engaged or interact with this student population in the classroom by getting to know them. Faculty members must be willing to recognize the diverse social trajectories that underrepresented minority students may have undertaken to arrive in the collegial classroom. This is does not suggest reducing the intellectual expectations, but it requires a tailored approach that is responsive to the learning needs of underrepresented minority students. Faculty members offering a developed sense of empathy and support can provide a classroom climate more conducive for underrepresented minority students' success.

Implications for Policy

University policies regarding student services can incorporate school social workers in higher education. To foster retention and persistence in higher education, school social workers are equipped with the knowledge skill set to practice with underrepresented minority students. Findings from this study have provided an additional understanding about the barriers to degree completion from the perception of underrepresented undergraduate and graduate minority students. This information will enable educators and university counselors to have first-hand knowledge about the severity of social psychological barriers, how these barriers can impede underrepresented minority students within the collegial setting, and how successful students prevailed beyond those barriers.

Participants in this study indicated an ideal university would offer multicultural pedagogy. Abrams and Gibson (2007) articulated that there is a growing need for pedagogy to engage unremittingly in effective multicultural approaches. To become effectively integrated in the collegiate setting, it is necessary to include content in the curriculum for which all students can feel acclimatized. This suggests that higher education curricula must reflect and include the diversity of its student populations to ensure academic success and persistence. An all-inclusive collegiate setting is representative of its student population.

The implications for policy hinge on the study findings, which show issues at the intersection of barriers and college completion for underrepresented minority students' perceptions. What participants employed to negotiate educational services and to navigate support and solutions to overcome perceived barriers must be considered. Understanding the solutions and strategies that successful underrepresented minority students in higher education used will provide a holistic resolution to continue to explore policies to prevent and decrease attrition of underrepresented minority students in universities.

Recommendations

One recommendation is that the university can employ graduate students from underrepresented minority backgrounds to work as mediators between the classroom and the advising department. This involves graduate students acting as academic and social coaches to underrepresented minority students. The coach can be informed of the

students' progress and their challenges and can then meet or communicate with the

faculty member to discuss such challenges. Coaches can then review notes and discuss

course content with students, particularly new terminology, and concepts. The coach is

not a tutor per se but will provide clarity on general course content with underrepresented

minority students. If supported by the university this service also has the potential to be a

virtual classroom (Google group) where underrepresented minority students can be

supported academically and to some extent socially.

To address this concern the university should assess how course content is being

delivered and what areas of the curriculum need to be adjusted to ensure that all learners

can understand the lectures and discussions in the classroom. One way universities can

determine where changes are required is to include evaluation questions not only at the

end of the term but also at mid-term. This will allow faculty members an opportunity to

make changes to their mode of delivery and other areas when needed.

Findings from this study show that minority student associations and networks

should be promoted and supported by the university. One participant reported that

without the nexus of the Latino student association connection that she had from her

freshman year she would not have kept on track throughout her matriculation to become

so successful. The university could benefit from assessing ways to improve recruitment

and evaluation of these programs to allow maximum impact outcome. Also, to promote

minority students association the university can recruit graduate students who can be

peer-mentors, providing opportunities for recruitment and interactions with the students.

Another recommendation to help all students feel a part of or validated by the

university is a willingness by the university to demonstrate images and messages that

positively promote an all-inclusive campus where students from all backgrounds can aspire to succeed. Highlighting images of success captioning students from all backgrounds can encourage a sense of hope and aspiration for all students. The students who are visibly promoted and recognized by the university should reflect a multicultural landscape of college students. This will help students to know that they can aspire to successful completion, exemplifying an all-inclusive learning environment in which all students can thrive.

Some participants in this study shared that they were not even aware that the university cared about their feelings. The fact that they were given an opportunity to voice their perception of what an ideal university is validated them. Although this researcher is not directly involved in the recruitment or retention of underrepresented minority students at this university, participants felt that their needs were considered.

Another recommendation is for social workers to work alongside advisors and faculty to provide opportunities for students to discuss barriers related to cultural, social, and psychological issues. Almost all of the participants in this study expressed a sigh of relief when the interview ended. When asked if they sighed because they wanted the interview to end, they responded that they felt that they had no one they could have spoken to so candidly about their experiences. Some participants were surprised that the university cared about how they felt. The university should provide underrepresented minority students with access to social workers who are culturally and competently trained to effectively provide this service. Thus, students will have a safe place to discuss the concerns of underrepresented minority students on campus.

Academic social workers should be positioned in the student life department or counseling office to aid students. Social workers have the knowledge and skills set to build trust and effectively assist diverse student populations.

Social Work Consideration

Another noted recommendation for social work intervention in higher education is encouraged. Social work practice has an extant history of intervening and advocating in the education systems and other systems for underserved and diverse populations. In fact, the core values of social work embody ethics that underpin social justice and self-actualization of individuals. Fundamentally, social work core values of respect for equality, dignity, and worth of all people embody diversity. As such, social work professionals have intervened extensively with underserved and underrepresented minority groups on various levels, including social services, health, and education systems. Social work practice is based on an all-inclusive philosophical premise--social justice, equal opportunities, fairness, and rights for all human beings. In addition, the human rights base of social work promotes diversity through interconnectedness and the wider community context.

During the last decade the shift in the student population on U.S. campuses reflects a greater number of underrepresented minority students. A need for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff to become culturally competent has emerged. Consequently, to ensure the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students are met, higher education curricula must embody a multicultural component. Underrepresented minority groups in higher education represent a variety of cultural and

ethnic differences, which brings to light the enormity of the contextual framework for addressing the issue of multiculturalism in the classroom. Recognizing this importance, CSWE stipulates that social work curricula encompass cultural competence and cultural relativism (CSWE, 2008). Social work promotes and emphasizes these core values in the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics. The ethical guidelines stipulate cultural competent practice as such:

1.5 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity   (a) Social Workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures. (b) Social Workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' culture and to differences among people and cultural groups.

(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, nation origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

Social Worker's Role in Higher Education

An academic professional role in higher education is of utmost importance because the emphasis of educational institutions is academic dissemination. In this context, academic assistance programs bolster the mission of academic institutions. However, clinical professionals play an important role in academia as well.

While some studies have substantiated the effectiveness of social workers' involvement in education on the primary and secondary school levels, much less attention

and focus has been given to the higher education level (e.g., Massat, Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2009). There are few studies on social work intervention in higher education. The literature does not indicate the rationale for the sparse representation of social work intervention in higher education; however, a conjecture can be formed from three factors. First, from the conception of social work's role in education, higher education was perceived as peripheral and not a domain of interest for oppressed or disenfranchised populations. Ironically, social work initially became involved in education institutions as a concerted effort to reduce truancy and academic failure of immigrant and other disadvantaged populations (Constable, 2008). Second, social work professionals do not study the advantaged as frequently as the oppressed, and students pursuing higher education are mostly perceived as occupying a privileged position on the educational strata. Third, social work scholarship focuses on multicultural pedagogy and cultural competence as important aspects of the social work curriculum. Interestingly, a school social worker's role in education is to ensure academic success by assisting underserved students to integrate in educational institutions, dating back to Arbuckle (1966), yet the scarcity of social workers at the college level is still evident (Vonk, Markward, & Arnold, 2000). The need for effective inclusiveness of underrepresented minority groups has paved the way for the role of social work in the higher education system. A feasible proposition is to advance policies that establish professional social work roles in higher education institutions as a viable intervention to intercept attrition of underrepresented undergraduate minority students. Thus, understanding the processes of social and psychological distress in the collegiate lives of underrepresented undergraduate students can mediate to counteract barriers highlighted in this study.

Future Research

No single program can be provided to eliminate attrition among underrepresented undergraduate minority students. The effort to decrease attrition factors must begin and conclude as a collaborative effort of all--university officials, educators, and students. HEA provided open access to educate minority students in higher education institutions since 1965. Forty years later, access is still promoted, but the success for all students remains a concern.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of successful underrepresented minority in a PWI in a Midwestern state. A review of current and past studies and theories on underrepresented minority attrition factors provided the background for this study. However, fully understanding the social psychological barriers that impede underrepresented minority students in higher education can only occur through an understanding of their experiences. This study revealed the perspective of successful underrepresented minority students to gain an understanding into their experience and challenges on a university campus. By understanding participants' shared experiences we can gain insight into how they navigate barriers and challenges in pursuit of a university degree.

In order to overcome challenges and barriers, participants shared solutions, support, and strategies used to persist successfully. Participants not only discussed their solutions and supports, such as family, mentors, and organizations that increase their work ethic, persistence, self-concept, and resilience, but also expressed experiences of self-doubt and perceptions of academic stereotype threat and feelings as social misfits. While most of the participants shared their struggles, challenges, and barriers, they

offered insights that are necessary for underrepresented minority students to successfully navigate completion of an undergraduate degree. Participants suggested that an ideal campus is all-inclusive or representational of students from all backgrounds. The study concludes with strong recommendation of employing and positioning social workers in higher education as a feasible intervention to work with underrepresented minority students to reduce attrition. This study is significant in that little research focuses on the success of the two underrepresented minority groups in this study, African American and Latino students, particularly using qualitative approaches.

A plethora of research on underrepresented minority students exists on who persists and completes an undergraduate degree. There is far less research on who succeeded despite significant barriers. Future studies should include national study that incorporates greater depth and variety of experiences and perceptions from a larger sample of studies from several universities. Further studies can provide more knowledge and insight on the barriers encountered and strategies used by underrepresented minority students to complete an undergraduate degree. Further understanding of the solutions, supports, and persistence strategies required can develop and bolster appropriate policies and social work interventions that ultimately will increase underrepresented minority retention in higher education.

Appendix A

INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

An Examination of Attrition Factors for Underrepresented Minority Undergraduates
Students: Phenomenological Perspectives of Successful Students and Graduates

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore barriers which impede
underrepresented minority students within collegial setting, and to see how successful
students managed to overcome those barriers. Understanding both the barriers that
underrepresented minority students in higher education face and learning about how they
negotiate and navigate through the educational system may help us to decrease attrition
rates. You were selected as a possible subject because you are an underrepresented
minority and either you have successfully graduated with an undergraduate degree within
the last 5 years or because you are a junior or a senior in an undergraduate program.

The study is being conducted by Dr. Margaret Adamek, Director of Social Work
Doctoral Program, and advisor to M. Gail Augustine, Doctoral Candidate at Indiana
University School of Social Work. It is not funded.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is twofold: (a) to explore barriers which impede
underrepresented minority students within an education setting and; (b) to understand
how some students managed to overcome those barriers. Understanding both the barriers
that underrepresented minority students in higher education face and learning about how
they negotiate and to navigate through the educational system can help us to decrease
attrition rates. This study will consist of the completion of a demographic data sheet and
an audio-recorded interview.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

Participate in a 60-90 minute face-to-face interview. During this interview, the
researcher will answer any questions you may have. If there is any question(s) you are
uncomfortable with, the question can be skipped.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot
guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if
required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study
may be published and databases in which results may be stored. The transcribed
interview and field notes will be stored electronically. All files will be saved as a
Microsoft Word document on the researcher's laptop and will be protected by a
password. No one except the research team consisting of the investigator, and the faculty
committee members will have access to the transcribed interviews**.** Each participant in
this study will have a random pseudonym assigned for the interviews. Individual

interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed by the investigator and then destroyed. Transcripts will be identified with numbered codes only to ensure anonymity. The transcripts will be kept confidential and no information that discloses personal identity will be released or published. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the research at any time without fear of consequences**.**

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) who may need to access your medical and/or research records.

PAYMENT

You will receive payment for taking part in this study.   Each participant will receive a $10.00 Starbuck gift card regardless if he/she decides to withdraw from the study later.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For questions about the study, contact the investigator M. Gail Augustine at Indiana University School of Social Work (317) 213-0553, or Dr. Margaret Adamek at Indiana University School of Social Work Indianapolis at (317) 274-6730.

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (317) 278-3458 or (800) 696-2949.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the investigator or Indiana University.

If you agree to participate, please respond to this email or you can call (317) 213-0553. The investigator will contact you to explain to you the purpose of the study and to answer any questions, which you may have about the study.

Appendix B

Invitation for Participation

Dear Mr. /Ms. (Individual Student's Name)

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that will explore barriers which impede underrepresented minority students within an education setting, and to see how some students managed to overcome those barriers. Understanding both the barriers that underrepresented minority students in higher education face and learning about how they negotiate and navigate through the educational system may help us to decrease attrition rates.

You are invited to participate in a 60-90 face-to-face minute interview. Your participation will be voluntary, and your identity will be concealed in any manuscript published or presentations of this study. Each participant in this study will have random pseudonym assigned for the interviews. If you agree to participate, please respond to this email or you can call 317-213-0553.

This study has been approved by Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis Institutional Review Board. If you agree to participate, you will be contacted later on this week by telephone to discuss your possible participation and to answer any questions which you may have prior to making your decision.

Thank you
M Gail Augustine
Doctoral Candidate
maraugus@iupui.edu

Appendix C

Interview Guiding Questions

Introduction

My name is M. Gail Augustine and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Indiana University. For my dissertation, I am researching the experiences of underrepresented minority students who have successfully completed an undergraduate degree and/or undergraduate students who are in their junior or senior year.

The purpose of this research study is twofold: (a) to explore barriers which impede underrepresented minority students within an education setting and; (b) to see how some students managed to overcome those barriers. Understanding both the barriers that underrepresented minority students in higher education face and learning about how they negotiate and to navigate through the educational system can help us to decrease attrition rates

You were identified because you are an underrepresented minority (Latino or African American) and either you have successfully graduated with an undergraduate degree or because you are a junior or a senior in an undergraduate program.

I invite you to participate in a 60-90 minute face-to-face interview. Your opinions will provide valuable information about graduation barriers and the strategies used by underrepresented minorities to help them cope so they graduate. I am grateful to you for answering my questions.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and no individual besides me will connect your identity with your information. During this interview, I will answer any questions you may have. If there is any question(s) you are uncomfortable with, we can skip the question.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. Walk me about your experience as an underrepresented minority student at this university?
2. Describe your perception of self (self-concept) as an underrepresented minority student at this university?
3. What are some of the challenges that you face at this university that can impede your degree completion?
4. Thinking back on your experience here on this campus, identify the barriers (if any) that you have faced, which may have hindered/challenged your successful undergraduate degree completion
5. What are some of the key supports, strategies that you accessed or found helpful in addressing these barriers?

   a. Tell me in your opinion, is this barrier(s) faced by all students or just by specific students?

6. How did you prevail against this barrier(s)?
   a. Describe other ways which you could have handled the circumstance(s)?
   b. What other students experience similar situations?

7. Tell me what resilient factor(s) is required to overcome barriers? Resilient refers to capacity to overcome adverse situation.
   a. How do you navigate barriers?
   b. What advice could you provide to other students encountering similar situation?
   c. What recommendations can you provide for this university to improve the retention of underrepresented minority students?
   d. What suggestions can you provide to this university so that they can provide better support in the future for underrepresented minority students?
      i. Provide specific resolutions?

8. Were there any challenges that you expected to encounter that you did not experienced?

9. What was your relationship with your instructors like?
   a. Tell me what does a good/ideal faculty-student relationship looks like to you?

10. Describe what are the good features of this university?
    a. What is this university doing well?

    b. What supports are missing?

11. Are there any other issues that you will like to discuss pertaining to your experiences?

12. How would you complete this statement: "For my undergraduate experience, I wish that my college was…….."

13. "The ideal campus would have been…."

Thank you for your time and the invaluable information you gave me for my study. Do you have any questions for me now that I have finished asking any questions?

Appendix D

Demographic Questions

1. What is your declared major:_____

2. Today's date: _____

3. Gender: Male _____ Female _____

4. What is your age?_____

5. Race/Ethnicity: African American____ Latino_____ Other_____ (*be specific*)

6. What is your Social Economic status (SES):
   Low income_____ Middle-Income_____ Higher-income _____

7. Are you a first generation college student?   YES _____   NO _____

8. Are you a Junior_____ Senior_____

9. Do you have an undergraduate degree :   YES   _____ NO_____

10. When did you receive your undergraduate degree? _____

11. What is your GPA ?   _____

Appendix E

Research Schedule

Activities	June 2014				July 2014				August 2014				Sept 2014				Oct 2014				Nov - Dec 2014			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Data collection, observation & transcribing	■	■	■	■																				
Data collection, observation, transcribing & member checking					■	■	■	■																
Complete transcribing, & member checking									■	■	■													
Summarizing and data coding													■	■	■									
Data analysis																	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Report Writing																	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

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CURRICULUM VITAE

M. Gail Augustine

EDUCATION

Diplomas & Certificates**:**

August 2015	**Indiana University-Purdue University**, Indianapolis. **Ph.D**. **Social Work**
Dec 2009	**Indiana University-Purdue University**, Indianapolis. Preparing Future Faculty Certificate
June 2006	**University of Norwich**, Norwich, Great Britain Post Qualifying Graduate Certificate
April 2004	**Eastern Michigan University,** Ypsilanti, Michigan **Master of Social Work (MSW)**
March 2004	**Michigan State,** Crisis Intervention Therapist Certification
April 2002	**Eastern Michigan University**, Ypsilanti, Michigan. **B.S**.**W**., **hon,** (Social Work)
May 2000	**Washtenaw College**, Ypsilanti, Michigan **A.A., hon**, (Human Services)
July 1989	**O'Neal Secretarial/Business College** Business Management/Administration Certificate

Academic Honors:

2010	MTCOP Joseph Taylor Chancellor Award of Excellence
2003	Woman of Excellence Award Eastern Michigan University.
2003	Phi Beta Kappa Award
2002	Eastern Michigan University Honour Society Award
2000	Academic Achievement Award
2000	Who's Who Among Students in American Universities & Colleges

LICENSES

Sept. 2000-Present   Licensed Masters Social Worker (LLMSW) Michigan

2005 – Present   General Social Care Council Registered (GSCC), Great Britain

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

2009 – Present   **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**, School of Social Work, Indianapolis, Indiana
Associate Faculty
Duties: Teach graduate and undergraduate social work courses; Academic Advisement. Program accredited by CSWE since 6-14-96.

2009-2012   **Martin University**, Division of Sociology, Indianapolis, Indiana
Adjunct Professor
Duties: Teach undergraduate and graduate courses; Academic Advisement. Higher Education accreditation

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2009-Present   **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis,** School of Social Work.
- Social Work Research (Individuals and Families, research)
- Social Work Research Online
- Social work Research Hybrid
- Advance level Social Work Research
- Understanding Diversity in a Pluralistic Society

2009 - 2011   **Martin University,** Division of Sociology, Indianapolis
Taught a full 4 courses (12 credits) 2011-2012 Semester
- Advanced Research Practice with Individuals
- Principles of Sociology
- Social Interaction
- Social Problems
- Multicultural Issues
- Applied Statistics for Behavioral and Social Science
- Philosophy of Science
- Critical Thinking
- Grant Writing and Program Evaluation Graduate level.
- Emancipatory Narratives-issues on Diversity *Class size 48 – 50*

Research Assistantship
2007-2009   **Indiana University,** School of Social Work
                       Graduate Research Assistant: Conducted research that
                       resulted in published article: Khaja, K., Queiro-Tajalli, I.,
                       Lay, K. & Augustine, M. G. (2009). A Qualitative
                       Research Study on the Impact of 9/11 on Muslims Living
                       in Australia, Argentina, Canada, and the United States.

April2004 - Dec 2004   **Eastern Michigan University,** After School Program
                       Research/ Program Evaluator: Conducted research
                       Program evaluation for Mayor's Time After-School
                       Program in Detroit Michigan. Evaluation of staff and
                       program components to determine sustainability.
                       Conducted evaluation and SPSS data analysis.

2002-2004   **Eastern Michigan University**, School of Social Work
                       Supplemental Instruction Coordinator Assistant:
                       Technical and instructional assistance for Supplemental
                       Instruction Learning courses. Prepared instructional and
                       training materials for students and liaison with faculty to
                       provide effective Supplemental Instruction tutoring
                       sessions for high risk undergraduate courses. Coordinated
                       and Provided Training for Supplemental Instruction
                       Leaders.

2005 – 2006   **University of East Anglia**, Cambridge, Great Britain
                       Social Work Field Instructor for graduate students field
                       practicum. Supervised graduate students at the agency.
                       Liaison with the university, conduct assessments skills, and
                       social work practice knowledge.

2005 – 2007   **Community and Mental Health Services**, Cambridge,
                       Social Services Provider/Clinical Supervisor
                       Duties: Independently supervised/managed mental and
                       behavioral clinical caseload with Psychiatrist, psychologist
                       & Clinical Social Service Provider.

2006 – Present   **Consultant/Program Evaluator**
                       Develops manuals, training and orientation materials, and
                       conducts training sessions, workshops, and seminars for
                       professional and para-professional social work staff. Grant
                       writing and program evaluation.

2008 – Present   **Journal Reviewer**
                       Perspective of Social Work Journal

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Augustine, G. M. (2015). An examination of attrition factors for underrepresented minority undergraduate students: Phenomenological perspectives of successful students and graduates. The 19th Annual PhD Spring Symposium. Indiana University

Augustine, G. M. & Gentle-Genitty, C. (2013). A perspective on the historical epistemology of social work education. *Journal of Perspective of Social Work*, 9 (2), 9-20.

Augustine, G. M. (2011). Human Trafficking: When Policing Goes Wrong. The 15th Annual PhD Spring Symposium. Indiana University

Augustine, G. M., Larimer, S.G. & Saylor, A. (2010). MSW Graduate first Year Experience. The 14th Annual PhD Spring Symposium. Indiana University.

Khaja, K., Barkdull, C., Augustine, M.G. & Cunningham, D. (2009). Female genital cutting: African women speak out. *International Social work Journal*, 52 (6).

Khaja, K., Grove, K., Gentle-Genitty, C., Augustine, G. M., Springer Thorington, J., & Modibo, N. N. (April, 2009). Diverse teaching pedagogy: Creating cultural safety in the classroom. *Multicultural teaching and learning institute. Supporting students' success in a diverse world.* Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, Indiana.

Augustine, G. M. (2009). United Kingdom Child Welfare Policy for At-Risk children from Ethnic Minority communities: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis. The 13th Annual PhD Spring Symposium. Indiana University.

Khaja, K., Queiro-Tajalli, I., Lay, K. & Augustine, M.G. (2009). A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of 9/11 on Muslims Living in Australia, Argentina, Canada and the United States. Affiliations: Indiana University School of Social Work, University of North Dakota School of Social Work, University of Utah, Graduate School of Social Work.

Augustine, G. M. (2008). High-risk students' participation in Academic Assistance Programs: An examination of selected psychosocial factors. The 12th Annual PhD Spring Symposium. Indiana University.

Augustine, G. M. (2006). Case Study: A psychosocial examination of sibling foster placement. Presented at University of Norwich, United Kingdom.

Augustine, G. M. (2004). A social Psychological Examination of The Supplemental Instruction Program. Presented at Eastern Michigan University's research Symposium.

- **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP AND AWARD**

  Member Multicultural Community of Practice Indiana University Purdue University Indiana (IUPUI

- MTCOP Joseph Taylor Chancellor Award of Excellence 2010

- Board Member of Cambridge Domestic Violence Committee Great Britain Phi Kappa Phi Honour

- Eastern Michigan University Honour

- AuthorAID membership