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Representation and Equity Gaps in Higher Education: Conceptualizing Minority Representation in Graduate Programs at an MSI

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
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Phylecia Love
Higher Education Leadership

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Abstract

Racially minority students and faculty are disproportionately underrepresented nationally, particularly at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), which are meant to serve minority populations (Hurtado et al., 2008). As the number of minority students grows, the gap for representation grows wider, which has added to the high departure of minority students. Additionally, the lack of faculty representation has minority faculty experiencing racial fatigue and tokenism. This qualitative research used the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to explore how students and faculty conceptualize representation in their graduate program at an MSI.

By employing co-constructed interviewing in the data collection, the researcher created an intimate, relational, and flexible method of in-depth conversations that focused on telling and listening; the respondents in this study gave their experiences with representation in their current graduate program and built ideal models of representation. Through intimate interaction, follow-up questioning, and shared experiences, faculty and students expressed how perceived behaviors, policies, and procedures were determinants that contribute to the minority population disparities within the institution. The conclusions suggested that institutional leaders embrace and encourage differences by implementing strategies to recruit and retain more minority faculty and intentionally support inclusive policies at MSIs to increase student and faculty belonging and the value of diversity through equitable populations.

Acknowledgment

There have been so many people to recognize for this journey. This was one of the most trying journeys I have ever encountered. There were so many bumps and curves, but I finally made it to the destination with the help of my wonderful community.

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To my parents, thank you for not giving up on me and seeing me through this process. As a first-generation student and now the first to complete a doctoral degree, I hope that I have set a great example of what you have encouraged me to be.

Most of all, to my son Doriyon and my daughter Briyana, I owe it all to you. Thank you for sacrificing your mother at times and never complaining about it. You two have been the everlasting constants that keep me motivated to keep moving forward. I pray that I have made you proud of me and that you go on to excel me in everything that you do.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) were developed as a response to the historical inequity and lack of access experienced by minority students at many major higher education institutions (HEIs) (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) include "Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TSUs)" (p. 6). These institutions create an undertaking to serve and educate students of color by providing culturally sensitive campus climates that are inclusive of the needs of underrepresented groups (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Minority Serving Institutions, in conjunction with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, have attempted to reduce the disparities that have caused divisions in opportunity and access (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). As DEI efforts in higher education seek to make access to higher education a viable option for minority students, the efforts for an inclusive campus are sometimes deficient (Smith, 2015). Diversifying the student body was the opening gambit towards impartiality for postsecondary institutions; however, there has also been a demand to diversify the faculty for minority students to have representation on campus (Stout et al., 2018). Leadership behaviors, policies, and procedures that contribute to an equitable, inclusive, and diverse environment for faculty and students of color have also contributed to representation, which has been shown to create a more positive environment on HEI campuses (Smith, 2015).

Research has shown that minority students' persistence is linked to faculty and staff representation (Moody, 1988). Several studies have concluded that minority students, specifically African American students, are likely to depart from higher education due to limited connections and accessibility to minority professors, mentors, or other minorities in leadership.

(King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996). This research seeks to understand the experiences surrounding the representation of minoritized students' identities and how faculty and students would conceptualize ideal representation in a graduate program.

Background

Historically, education for minority students has been unequally distributed in the United States. Understanding the groundwork for the contemporary push for diversity, equity, and inclusion requires understanding the reasons behind the historical uphill battle for minority access to higher education (Fasching-Varner, et al., 2014). The construction and placement of many higher education institution buildings were due to prominent businessmen enslaving Black Africans and invading the territory of Indigenous people (Wilder, 2013). The higher education business curriculum instilled Black people's ownership and free labor in the students (p.134). Many prestigious universities such as Brown, Yale, Harvard, and Duke supported and promoted the slave trade and further enlisted slaves for the construction of their structures and the upkeep of the campuses (p. 289-292). People of color and Indigenous people were handled inhumanly by the campus Presidents, staff, and students and viewed as the property of the institutions (p. 114).

After slavery was abolished, African Americans continued to face discrimination in education. Many higher education institutions were not open to accepting minorities, even after desegregation laws were passed. Historical court cases such as the 1935 Murray v. University of Maryland decision, which resulted in the admission of the first Black male to the University School of Law at Baltimore, set new precedence for litigation regarding minority access to higher education (Johnson, 1954). Although mandates were being executed to allow admission for Black students, the accommodations for access were not mandated. Blacks were often required to have separate arrangements for classrooms, bathrooms, and dormitories (p. 322). At

that time, the only way that Black students could receive an education in the Southern portion of the U.S. was to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

To answer the need for African American students to receive education, in 1837, Quaker philanthropist Richard Humphreys founded Cheyney Pennsylvania School for Colored People, which was later renamed Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the first HBCU (Fast facts: Historically Black colleges and universities (667). In time, more HBCUs were established in response to the Second Morrill Act of 1890, which required states that reinforced racial segregation to fund public higher education institutions (HEIs) for African American students (Fast facts: Historically Black Colleges and Universities Historical Origins of HBCUs, 2010). This funding enabled more Black people to attend college and helped to establish 107 HBCUs throughout the United States ("Fast facts: Historically Black colleges and universities").

Historically Black Colleges and Universities fulfilled the social contract with African Americans and higher education. As non-HBCUs began to allow access to minority students, there were still many discriminatory practices that were underpinned in many admission processes. In response to these disparities, the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, sanctioned anti-discrimination law ("Types of educational opportunities discrimination," 2021). The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 prohibits intentional segregation of race, color, and national origin ("Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974"). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 set a new precedent by prohibiting discrimination in education and several other sectors ("Civil Rights Act of 1964"). Title IV, which affected education and authorized "the Attorney General to confront equal protection violations based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in institutions of higher education" ("Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972"); Title IX, "permitting the United States to intervene in pending suits alleging discrimination"

(“Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972”); and Title VI which “prohibits discrimination of federal funding recipients based of race, color, and national origin” ("Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”).

As new policies and laws became prominent in education, HEIs had to respond to the push for diversity, which caused some uproar from the dominant race; henceforth, litigation involving White people, thinking that attempts to create equity were attacks or discrimination against them, was heard by the Supreme Court. Cases such as Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (2009), Fisher v. University of Texas (2022), and Grutter v. Bollinger further promote the “ruling that diversity is a compelling interest that can justify the narrowly tailored use of race when public universities select applicants for admission” ("Grutter v. Bollinger," 2015). These cases recognized the need for diversity access but could not undo the aggressive undertone that had been set. Research implies that African Americans, as well as other minoritized groups, have negative experiences while attending colleges and universities, which results in higher attrition due to a lack of retention (King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996). One of the most consistent findings in research regarding minority departure is the lack of faculty representation to provide support to minoritized students (Ajayi et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

The diversification of faculty in higher education has fallen behind the diversification of the student population. One of the responses to this disparity is the growing prevalence of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), which addresses the continuation of historical inequity, lack of entrance acceptance at many institutions for minorities, and the demographic changes in the United States (Schmidt, 2022). Because MSI enrollment includes many underrepresented students, these institutions must be successful in providing adequate representation in response to

the growing minority student population (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). Minority Serving Institutions provide a significant contribution to delivering education that mirrors the changing workforce and higher education trends, particularly in uplifting the perspective of disadvantaged populations while lowering the underrepresentation of minorities in graduate programs in careers that require graduate-level education and training (Schmidt, 2022; Gasman & Conrad, 2013). However, MSI faculty overall are still made up of White faculty, although these institutions recruit students with minoritized identities (Schmidt, 2022).

Further research has shown that this lack of representation is one of the causes of the high departure rate of minority students (Seidman, 2005). There is an expectation from the minority population that colleges and universities make intentional efforts to respond to the ethnically diverse student population (Hu & Kuh 2003). As education tries to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion to break xenophobic undertones set by the dominant race, institutions should implement policies that can advance social justice for minoritized students in graduate studies (p. 321). Some of these efforts should include diversifying the student body as well as promoting adding multicultural artifacts and curricula to institutions (Arday, 2019).

Colleges and universities have attempted to create programs that serve underrepresented students better, but there is still much work to be done (Hurtado et al., 2008). Before the rulings of many historical court cases regarding discriminatory policies, students of color had limited access that was afforded to non-minority could more easily attain. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978), banned the use of quotas; however, there was still a demand for post-secondary recognition of retention programs for minority students ("Regents of the University of California v. Bakke," 2010.). The decisions in both Gratz v. Bollinger (2003) and Grutter v. Bollinger (2003), along with several state reforms

“canceled the use of race in admissions, government contracts, and hiring practices and programs that serve minority students” ("Racial Preferences in Higher Education," 2014).

Many studies have focused on minority undergraduate enrollment, access, and persistence (Baker & Velez, 1996). However, there is still a need to employ those studies in graduate studies. Postbaccalaureate student enrollment, which includes master’s, doctoral, and professional doctoral programs like medical and law school, is expected to increase by “10% over the next 10 years” ("National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education - Postbaccalaureate enrollment," 2023). In the fall of 2020, “3.1 million advanced graduate students, of which 1.7 million were White, 383,900 were Black, 340,900 Hispanic, 240,000 Asian, and 98,000 identified as two or more races” ("National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education - Postbaccalaureate enrollment," 2023). Although the increase in minority enrollment in postgraduate programs has created more racial diversity in advanced degree programs, institutions still have more opportunities to make representation of students and faculty the foci of the graduate experience.

Statement of Purpose

In response to the high attrition and limited sense of belonging of minority students in graduate programs and the lack of faculty representation, this quantitative study seeks to understand the experiences surrounding the representation of minoritized students’ identities and how representation is conceptualized in an ideal graduate program for faculty and students.

While there is an increased body of research that uses qualitative data to measure minority undergraduate experiences at predominately White institutions (PWIs), which has aided in the development of more DEI programs, there is a need for more research concerning the attrition of minority postbaccalaureate students at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). In

addition, DEI should not be limited to the student population but should extend to faculty representation to address the demand for minoritized representation and curriculum influence. For example, in 2020, 79% of all full-time lecture professors were White; Black and Hispanic only held 8% of full-time professor positions ("Fast facts: Race/ethnicity of college faculty (61)," n.d.).

The work of DEI includes faculty, administrators, and students from the inception of college and continually throughout their advanced degree completion. According to Chen (2017), professional practices in diversity are influenced by the "relationship between higher education and diverse communities." The standards that advise the relationship between diversity and diverse instructional leadership include the following: "developing trust and engaging individual cultures, developing new admissions and hiring policies, and introducing diversity into the institution through a systemic approach" (p. 19). This study will reinforce the urgency for intentional diversity in all facets of higher education to provide inclusiveness for the growth of minoritized students in advanced degree programs.

This work is also vital for institutions that hold MSI designations. As these institutions get recognition for diverse campus climates that answer to minority students, equity and inclusion have been questionable when supporting those students to persist ("Minority serving institutions program," 2021). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been shown to provide African American students with the highest representation in campus climate, faculty, and administration. However, HSIs have still shown some gaps in equity and inclusion (Barnett et al., 2016). Some studies have shown that subtle forms of discrimination and microaggression have been the experience of minority students because of not having a diverse faculty to mirror the student population (Stevens et al., 2018); therefore, the implications of this

study will address the disparate experience of minority students and faculty and help to create provisions to improve upon the sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Faculty diversity is crucial in college student graduation and can significantly improve retention rates, students' sense of belonging, and persistence (O'Keeffe, 2013). Higher education institutions have struggled to diversify their faculty while the employment and retaining of women and people of color at rates far below their representation in their student body (Griffin, 2020). When students with minoritized identities engage with faculty of color, students receive different perspectives, a sense of empathy, respect for others, and creativity, and improve problem-solving skills (Grant Jr & Hill, 2020). Minority students "are pursuing college degrees in more significant numbers and are more inclined to complete their education when they attend institutions with diverse faculty who look like them" (Thomas et al., 2007; Bitar et al., 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) supports the work done in this research by exploring the relationship between faculty representation of minoritized student identities and graduate retention. This theory stems from historical hindrances to the inequitable distribution of power in America, which is supported by a legal system that enables the continuation of these unequal power relationships in society (Taylor et al., 2023).

Critical Race Theory challenges the microaggression that exists in education, law, politics, and other social systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). There are five tenets that CRT scholars subscribe to that support the doctrine: "counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism" (Hiraldo, 2018). Critical Race Theory attempts to disturb the notion that racism, oppression, and microaggression is prevalent in societal norms, even in higher education. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The counter-storytelling tenet of CRT, which is the more applicable tenet for this study, allows the narratives and stories of underrepresented races to be communicated to audiences that may not be aware of their oppressive experiences (Patton et al., 2016). The qualitative work of many literary studies has allowed students to share their experiences with the lack of representation in faculty and/or student population, how it affects their college experience, and if it resulted in premature departure and negative college experiences. Additionally, the tenet of counter-stories also aids in addressing campus climates to make intentional efforts for diversity and inclusion. Although institutions attempt to create a diverse campus by making education accessible to minority students, the lack of minority representation in faculty diminishes the efforts of institutions to retain underrepresented students by providing adequate support (Hiraldo, n.d).

The underpinnings of the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory expose the effects of racially discriminatory undertones on minorities' experiences in education by magnifying their stories, experiences, narratives, and truths (Walker, 2020). This research centers the counter-storytelling tenet as in its theoretical framework as it is used to elevate minority voices, perspectives, and experiences (Kamanga, 2019). This method allows minority narratives to rise and challenge the traditional narratives shaping our society.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the work of this study:

- How do minority graduate students at an MSI conceptualize the representation of their identity in the classroom?
- How do faculty conceptualize the representation of minoritized students' identities in the classroom?

- How do student and faculty conceptualization of representation in the classroom align, and where do they diverge?

According to Patti and Ellis (2017), co-constructed interviewing is an "intimate and flexible method of conversational interviewing that focuses on facilitating and examining the collaborative meaning-making processes of telling and listening". demonstrating their vulnerabilities and intimate understanding of the student and faculty experience, rapport can be established with the participants. This study employed co-constructed interviewing to create interactive sessions with open-ended questions to create more dialogic and mutually influential research relationships.

The students and faculty were recruited from a master's level graduate program from the National College of Education (NCE) at National Louis University (NLU). Before recruiting for the focus groups, a prescreening questionnaire was used to qualify the desired participants. Because this study aimed to understand how graduate minority students conceptualize representation, racially minority students were the targeted demographic group; however, the study did not eliminate any participants.

Overview of Research Design

This qualitative study employed co-constructed focus groups and individual interviews with graduate students and faculty to examine minority students' experiences with representation in their graduate programs and graduate faculty members' perception of representation in graduate faculty at National Louis University (NLU). National Louis University has the federal designation as a Hispanic Service Institution (HSI) (National Louis University, n.d.). For an institution to be designated as an HSI, the institution "must be a 2 or 4-year public or private

college or university with 25 percent or more undergraduate full-time equivalent Hispanic enrollment" (Santiago, 2006).

Data for this study was collected through focus groups and individual interviews, and then data was reviewed through rounds or email feedback. Co-constructed interviews engaged participants in conversations that "foreground the role of the interviewee in the construction and negotiation of meaning" (Dwyer et al., 2016). Complete details of the methods used in this study are shared in Chapter 3.

Overview of Paper

Student diversity has continued expanding in higher education, though data show faculty diversity has not kept pace. Chapter 1 has introduced the study, an overview of the theoretical framework, the research question, and analysis. Chapter 2 is the literature review, which focuses on the increased enrollment of racially diverse students and the need for policies that enhance positive minority students' experiences to increase those students' persistence and graduation rates. Chapter 2 also gives an overview of racial identity frameworks, student development, and historic efforts to retain minority students. Chapter 3 lays out the study's methodology, including identifying and defining critical elements of the study and discussing procedures. Chapter 4 of this research provides an interpretation of the findings based on the responses of the participants and an overall summary of the data findings. This chapter also presents the students, faculty, and combined model of representation in a graduate program. Chapter 5 provides a complete discussion of the findings, including the implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and study conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the importance of minority representation in higher education by exploring five domains: racial identity and student development, historical retention efforts of minoritized students, campus climates and representation, minority representation of faculty, and racial identity theory, with a strong focus on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework. In addition, the literature review will explore scholars' work around the representation of student identities in the faculty and administration.

Racial Identity and Student Development

Societal perceptions and artifacts that are perpetuated from past oppressions have contributed to the identity formation of many minoritized individuals (Chrobot-Mason, 2004). Sports teams, both collegiate and professional, have changed their mascots due to the mockery that was displayed in celebratory dance and chant (Fenelon, 2016); historical movies such as *Gone with the Wind* have been removed due to the representation of Black women and slavery (Guerrero, 1993); political leaders and their supporters attempted to create efforts to build a wall along the Texas border to prevent immigration and citizenship from one group of people (Castañeda, 2019). Ultimately, at stake here is the rise of systemic racism, which leads to oppression and creates conflicting information about identity (Tatum, 1992).

Researchers have placed emphasis on identity development, which has led to more developmental models of identity. Such models include Phinney's model of ethnic identity (1990), which held that the issues surrounding ethnic identity are critical to the development of an affirmative self-concept for minority adolescents, and Torres's (1999) bicultural orientation model and influence on Latino identity, which validated the bicultural orientation model (BOM) demonstrating a correlation between assimilation and ethnic identity among 10 Latino/a college

students using ethnicity which are “narrowly defined by the distinguishing differences of a group that are based on national or cultural characteristics.” Jones & McEwen (2000) developed a conceptual model named the Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) that contributed to the development of many other identity models. In this study, 10 culturally diverse undergraduate women enrolled at an East Coast university participated in a qualitative study that included three open-ended question interviews (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The participants included “5 White, 2 African Americans, 1 African, 1 Sri Lankan, and 1 Asian Indian; religious affiliations included Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Holiness Pentecostal” (p. 407). The findings of the study fell into the following 10 themes: “relative salience of identity dimensions in relation to difference; the multiple ways in which race matters; multiple layers of identity; the importance of cultural identifications and cultural values; the influence of family and background experiences; current experiences and situational factors; relational, inclusive values and guiding personal beliefs; career decisions and future planning; the search for identity” (p. 408). The participants wanted to be “understood as they understood themselves and as the totality of who they were and not through the projected viewpoints that society has placed on them” (p. 408). The study also found that the most significant influences on identity included culture, family, race, gender, education, religion, and relationships with others from different backgrounds (p. 408). The conceptual model built from the results uncovered the meaning of the core category, race, and the participants' identity stories (p. 409). The model represents “multiple dimensions of identity development for a diverse group of women college students” (p. 409). The conceptual model also proposes the usefulness “of understanding the complexities of identity development and why educators should not assume what is central to individuals but instead listen and observe how a person views themselves” (p. 409). In addition, this study underscored “the

importance of seeing students as they see themselves or as they reveal themselves to others" (p. 408).

Social identity development theories have been used by student affairs educators and faculty in helping to understand students from different backgrounds. In Sellers et. al's 1998(b) study, the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) brought awareness to the importance of "race in the self-concepts of African Americans and the qualitative meanings they attribute to being members of that racial category" (p. 18). This framework focuses on the self-concepts and attributes associated with minority racial categories (p.19).

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity illustrates racial identity in Black Americans as the central contribution to their association with the Black race (Sellers et al., 1998b). Due to the significance of the racial identity that African Americans associate with their membership to their racial group, the MMRI racial identity definition uses qualitative methods to answer two questions: "How important is race in the individual's perception of self?" and "What does it mean to be a member of this racial group?" (Sellers et al., 1998b). Seller et al. noted MMRI has four assumptions that reinforces its framework:

1. "That properties of African Americans' identities are situationally influenced" (p.23)
2. "There are many different identities that individuals may have and each one has its own hierarchical order" (p. 23)
3. "That racial identity is an indication of one's self-perception" (p.23)
4. "Racial identity status is the primary concern of MMRI rather than the development of it" (p. 23).

These assumptions are the foundation for the MMRI and build four dimensions that address the importance of the qualitative meaning of African American self-concept (p. 24). The four

dimensions are the centrality of the identity, the ideology associated with identity, racial salience, and the centrality of the identity (p.24). Each dimension of the MMRI framework attempts to solidify the complexity of racial identity in African Americans. Higher education practitioners apply the MMRI as a means of application when specifically addressing Black students without generalizing all minoritized students to address questions of Black students' persistence.

The validity of the three dimensions of the MMRI (centrality, ideology, and regard) is measured by the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) in African American college students and adults (Shockley et al., 2014). The MIBI is made up of the Centrality scale, which mirrors the level at which one may define oneself regarding race and Ideology, which attempts to remedy how African Americans should relate with society (Shockley et al., 2014; Sellers et al., 1997). Ideology has four subscales, which are Nationalist, Oppressed Minority, Assimilationist, and Humanist (Shockley et al., 2014). The Nationalist ideology focuses on the uniqueness and significance of being Black as a central part of their identity and seeks to preserve the culture (Sellers et al., 1997). In contrast, if one has an ideology of viewing race as a whole and focuses on the common factors as a community, then they would be described as having the humanist ideology (p. 807). The "oppressed minority ideology emphasizes the racism that African Americans and other minority groups experience and wants unity among minorities" (Shockley et al., 2014). Lastly, assimilation ideology attempts to find commonality between African Americans and the dominant American culture and suggests that Black people join in mainstream culture (p. 106).

In 1998, Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke conducted a study on "the relationship between racial identity and persistence in Black college students." The MMRI was administered to explore the relationship "between racial centrality, academic performance, and racial ideology"

(p. 8). The study participants were 248 undergraduate students (163 from Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and 85 from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)), who all identified as African American (Sellers et al., 1998b). The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) was also used to further measure their racial ideology and centrality. This mixed method study used a Likert scale to measure four racial ideologies of MIBI (Nationalist, Minority, Assimilation, and Humanist) (p. 15). The qualitative portion of this study asked the participants if they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "the struggle of Black people in America is unique and can only be solved by Black Americans" or "Blacks should support multicultural activities" (p. 15).

Qualitative methods were used to find the means and standard deviation for GPAs in relation to the Racial ideology subscales and Centrality (p.17). Results from the PWI found that the Assimilation and Humanist subscale scores were significantly higher than the HBCU; the Centrality scale was significantly higher at the HBCU, and no difference was observed in the Oppressed Minority ideology subscale (p. 17). The one-way ANOVA found no significant difference in GPA, centrality or racial ideology in relation to gender, income, or class (p. 17). Overall, the results of the study proved racial centrality and racial ideology were relative to the GPA of Black students at both institutions (p. 20).

History of Efforts to Retain Minoritized Students

Historically, minority experiences in higher education have been a matter of contention. Although HBCUs were an immediate answer to addressing the collegiate needs of African American students prior to the Civil War, segregation laws further advanced the limitations of access and persistence of higher education after the Civil War ("Fast facts: Historically Black colleges and universities (667)"). Although HBCUs were founded to educate Black students who

were excluded by predominately White institutions, HBCUs do not limit their access to only Black students. In 2021, “25 percent of students at HBCUs were White, compared with 15 percent in 1976, which is a 14 percent increase” ("Fast facts: Historically Black colleges and universities (667)," n.d.). However, the total number of minority students attending degree-granting institutions (both HBCUs and non-HBCUs) has drastically increased since desegregation became illegal ("Fast facts: Historically Black colleges and universities (667)," n.d.).

As Black and other minority students have now begun to explore their collegiate options outside of HBCUs, the departure rate for those students has increased (Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Extensive qualitative research has measured underrepresented students’ experience and improved DEI efforts (Hurtado et al., 1999). However, the qualitative measurements have been shown to have limited effectiveness. Green (2007) discussed the importance of qualitative assessment for minority-structured programs that are aimed to serve those student’s college experience. Green identifies ten steps for conducting qualitative assessment on retention programs;

1. Include competent evaluators in the program and assessment development process
2. Align qualitative methods with program goals, objectives, and outcomes
3. Recruit insiders and outsiders to assist with the assessment process
4. Establish the evaluator’s biases and cultural competence prior to data collection
5. Consider the role that racial/ethnic identity plays in sampling and recruitment
6. Be aware of institutional review board concerns
7. Adequately prepare video and audio equipment
8. Match along dimensions of race/ethnicity

9. Use appropriate data analysis procedures while paying attention to race/ethnicity
10. Conduct member checks" (p. 42-50).

Green (2007) demonstrates the limitations of qualitative assessment if the person conducting and assessing the qualitative evaluation and analysis does not employ these steps. For example, if the researcher has limited training and/or experience in qualitative methods, then the assessment may fail to produce the study's appropriate product and overall objective (p. 43). Also, one department should not be solely responsible for conducting the institutional research at a PWI regarding minority retention due to the required support from other institutional domains (p. 44); hence, assuring that the institutional researcher or evaluator's instrument addresses all the programmatic goals and long-term outcomes is quintessential in qualitative assessment.

Green's (2007) distinction in the successful qualitative assessment of minority retention is important for many reasons: The increased departure of minoritized students from higher education instructions has created interference in offering equable educational experiences and opportunities while increasing academic and social adversities encountered by minorities students who are determined to persist (p. 45). Many factors have been identified through qualitative research that have an impact on the persistence and retention rates; hence, conducting thorough and concise qualitative assessments with an understanding of all influences, theories, and overall behaviorism could yield more plausible outcomes and produce a product that can be useful for the implementation of retention programs (p. 45).

Student Representation

Negative student experiences have been shown to have a correlation between minority students' retention rates and minority students' sense of belonging (Genheimer, 2016). A phenomenological case study conducted by Genheimer (2016) at a Midwest liberal arts

Predominantly White College (PWI) explored whether minority faculty involvement had an impact on the experience of minority students. In this study of 1,900 students, 85% were identified as White students, and 15% were minority (Asian 5.6%; Black 4%; Hispanic/Latino 4%) (p. 15). The student participants' demographic breakdown included three Black students, 2 Latino/Latina, 1 Chinese, and 1 Bahamian (p.16). The faculty and administrator demographic breakdown included two Black faculty and one African American administrator. Three themes developed from this study regarding contributors "involving minority faculty and staff included a safe space for students, accessibility, and advocacy for and representation of minorities on campus" (p. 20). The faculty, staff, and student participants stated that "minority professionals are positively involved with the minority student population on campus as possessing these three attributes" (p.20). The safe space was described as "comfortable and welcoming, and the ability to process on-campus experiences openly" (p. 20). The participants perceived "involved minority professionals as people who created a safe space for students, and faculty and staff participants also identified this attribute as a key part of their involvement with students" (p. 20). Welcoming and comfortable spaces for minority students were described as "feeling known and accepted in their ethnicity and race, also being known in the relational, academic, or spiritual parts of their lives as well as their racial and cultural context and experiences" (p. 20). Lastly, students expressed the importance of the importance "having a space to process, which was described as being able to communicate and confide with minority faculty and staff" (p. 20).

Based on the findings of this research, minority student experience is positively effective when minority faculty are present and actively engaged on campus. This study identified the crucial role minority faculty and staff engagement has on the experiences of minority students

(Genheimer, 2016). Collegiate experiences were shown to be beneficial for minority students who experience positive interactions with minority faculty or staff members.

College completion rates for minority "students are adversely affected by barriers and hostile campus racial environments, which lead to notable equity gaps within and across institutions" (Bowman & Denson, 2022). Bowman and Denson (2022) conducted a quantitative study to explore the "link between the representation of minoritized racial groups and equity gaps in six-year graduation rates." The study addressed four hypothesizes: The first hypothesis was that the "representation of same-race undergraduate students and instructors would be associated with smaller equity gaps in graduation rates" (p.405); the next hypothesis was that representation of students and instructors from different minoritized racial groups will be associated with reduced equity gaps in graduation (p. 406); At institutions in which one racially minoritized group comprises at least half of students or instructors, same-race equity gaps in graduation rates will be small or not significantly different from zero; The link between racial representation and equity gaps in graduation rates will be weaker or less prevalent at institutions with a greater proportion of students who are enrolled in fully online coursework (Bowman & Denson, 2022).

These data were collected from the 2017 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (p. 407). The sample consisted of 2,807 U.S. four-year colleges and universities (p. 407). The institutions consisted of "56.8% private not-for-profit, 26.6% public, and 16.6% private for-profit; 3.2% of institutions were HBCUs, and 0.5% were tribal colleges" (p. 407).

The student population included undergraduates who were White/Caucasian (53.8%), Black/African American (15.3%), Hispanic/Latinx (12.0%), Asian American (4.4%), nonresident alien/international (4.3%), multiracial (3.1%), American Indian/Alaska Native (1.2%), Native

Hawaiian /Pacific Islander (0.3%), and from an unknown race/ethnicity (5.8%) (p. 407). The faculty demographic included the following: 73.0% White/Caucasian, 8.8%; Black/African American, 5.8% ; Asian American, 4.2%; Hispanic/Latinx, 1.2% nonresident alien/international; 1.1% identified as two or more races; 0.6% American Indian/Alaska Native; 0.3% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5.1% from an unknown race/ethnicity (p. 408).

The regression results for student representation were consistent with Hypothesis #1, same-race representation was significantly associated with smaller equity gaps in graduation rates among Black, Latinx, Asian, and international students (Bowman & Denson, 2022). Additionally, greater same-race representation of instructors had significantly smaller graduation equity gaps for Black, Latinx, and Asian students (p. 412). The representation of Latinx, Asian, and Native instructors also predicted smaller Black-White gaps and the representation of Black and Native instructors was associated with smaller Latinx-White gaps. The results for instructor racial representation were parallel to the patterns for student representation (Bowman & Denson, 2022). Institutions with greater same-race representation of instructors had significantly smaller graduation equity gaps for Black, Latinx, and Asian students (p. 413).

Overall, this research study showed that the representation of minoritized students' identities in the faculty is necessary for promoting equity in student success. The findings were consistent with the first hypothesis that the representation of same-race undergraduate students and instructors will be associated with smaller equity gaps in graduation rates; same-race representation was significantly associated with smaller equity gaps in graduation rates among Black, Latinx, Asian, and international students (p. 412). The results showed that matching race representation of faculty and students from other minoritized groups correlated with more notable racial equity in graduation results (p. 413).

Campus Climates and Representation

Social estrangement due to limited representation has deterred many minority students from continuing their education at higher education institutions (Allen, 1992). While HBCUs have been shown to have the most inviting climate for African American students, non-HBCU institutions are creating vigorous recruiting efforts for minorities in order to identify as diverse universities (p. 28). Much research has shown that African American students have a better chance of completion when there is a higher representation of their identity in faculty over the course of their academic career (p. 29). According to Campbell, Cater-Sowell, and Battle (2019), institutional campus climate is a determinant when measuring the persistence and completion of African American students. By using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), which "emphasizes the connections associated with the unique experiences that result from being designed as Black in American society," Campbell, et al., conducted a mixed-method research study to perceive the significance of race and satisfaction in Black students at two PWIs and one HBCU (352 students; 246 from PWIs; 106 from HBCU) (Campbell et al., 2019). The MMRI model has three assumptions regarding racial identity:

1. "Identities are stable properties of the person but can be influenced by situations;"
2. "Individuals have several different identities that have distinctive levels of importance to them;"
3. "An Individual's perception of what it means to be Black is the most valid indicator of racial identity (Campbell et al., 2019).

In addition to the MMRI, this study also attempted to measure the universal context of racism (UCR), which evaluates "the degree to which race-relevant events are accessible, explanatory,

and/or motivational" (p. 396). African American students from the participating institutions were asked to take part in a study concerning their life experience on campus (p.395).
The African American students at the PWIs reported that they had experienced racial discrimination, whereas at HBCUs, the Black students had more exposure to their racial identity and backgrounds (Campbell et al., 2019).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal institutions were formed to give African Americans and Native Americans the opportunity to participate in higher education when they may have been excluded. In contrast, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) is a designation that is applied when there is an increasing number of Hispanic/Latino students enrolling in a PWI (Laden, 2004). This designation from the U.S. Department of Education is "for higher education institutions that categorically or historically enroll a targeted racial/ethnic group." An institution is considered an HSI when a "minimum of 25% of full-time undergraduates are Latinx students and if at least 50% of them demonstrate financial need" (Laden, 2004).

Serrano (2020) interviewed 19 Latino and African American men at an HSI to assess their perceptions of the campus racial microclimate. This case study interviewed 8 African American men and 11 Latino male undergraduates from Dorsey State University (DSU), which is designated an HSI (Serrano, 2020). Dorsey State University includes students who are Latinx (58%), Asian American (14.8%), White (8.2), African American/Black (4.2%), and the rest comprised of American Indian, Pacific Islander, and two or more races (p. 6). At the time of this study, DSU's student body was majority-minority. However, their instructional tenure-tracked faculty was made up of more than 50% White, 15% Latinx, and 5% Black faculty members (p.6). This study found that Latino males felt a sense of belonging, whereas the Black males did

not share the same sentiments. Some of the Black participants described the campus population as a majority minority but not diverse due to the lack of African American students as well as faculty (p. 7).

Furthermore, the students in the study pointed out that DSU prides itself and advertises diversity, equity, and inclusion in its marketing. One of the participants proclaimed that "the word diverse should not be used at DSU. Just because a population we would consider to be a minority – well, minoritized- just because a minoritized population happens to be the majority here, it doesn't mean that the campus is diverse" (Serrano, 2020). On the other hand, the Latino students felt a sense of belonging because they had the support from other Latinx students to relate to and appreciate the diversity that DSU offered (p. 8).

Consequently, although the two groups had contrasting views regarding the perception of diversity of the student body, both Latino and Black men agreed that there was a gap in faculty representation of student identities. Both groups of students agreed that the only representation of color faculty at DSU was in the Ethnic Studies department (Serrano, 2020). Both the Black and Latinx students expressed their disconnect with faculty due to a lack of representation (p. 10). If minority students did not take an Ethnic Studies course, then they would not interact with minority faculty. Eighty percent of the participants made the decision to either change their major, take a double major, or take a non-required Ethnic studies course to have a connection with a minority faculty member (p.10).

Cultural Dissonance and Departure

Cultural dissonance has been shown to be correlated with academic departure in students of color (Quaye et al., 2015). To respond to this need, Kuh and Love (2000) found evidence that

precollege culture and campus cultures have an influence of minority students' premature departure and provided the following eight cultural propositions to support this position:

1. "The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.

2. One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.

3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the culture of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.

4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.

5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.

6. The amount of time a student spends in one's cultures of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.

7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.

8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence" (Kuh & Love, 2020).

Museus and Quaye (2009) conducted a qualitative inquiry on 30 minority students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) to corroborate Kuh and Love's cultural propositions on minority students' persistence. The 30 participants consisted of 12 Asians, 12 Blacks, and six Latinos who were in different years of college (Museus & Quaye, 2009). The interviews were

broken up into three phases that were all coded differently by different evaluators to create a less biased assessment. The results of this study ultimately found corresponding intercultural and cultural propositions in Kuh and Love's conceptual framework (Museus & Quaye, 2009). In each discovered proposition, the consensus was that students' precollege origins and cultural associations influence their ability to persist in college. In addition, students identified how cultural dissonance has been associated with incongruence with students' cultural origins, which affects their likelihood of departing from institutions where they may feel marginalized (p. 81).

Stereotypes and Microaggression

Research has shown Black students at PWIs face many barriers to success. These barriers include underrepresentation, racial stereotyping from professors and peers, which causes academic strains, and microaggression (McGee et al., 2019). In a phenomenological study done at a PWI, the effects created by threatening environments due to stereotyping and microaggression were explored. In this study, Boyd and Mitchell (2018) interviewed six African American males and analyzed their perceptions concerning the academic, social, and psychological influences stereotypes have on their persistence (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). The research questions that this study sought to answer were "What stereotypes do Black males experience in college, and what are the perceptions of Black males in college regarding the influences that stereotypes have on Black male achievement in college"? (p. 894).

The findings from this study identified the following four major themes which included internalization, stereotypes, persistence, and advice (p. 902). The internalization was discovered when participants spoke about their personal experiences with stereotyping in academic and social settings at their institution (p. 902). The stereotype theme was developed from the following concepts: Black male participants experienced "racial stereotypes in the form of

preconceived notions about their intelligence or the area of work/study they were expected to engage in; stereotype threats that included culturally threatening environment; every participant experienced macroaggression which was referred as subtle repeated insults, slander, or racial interactions frequently encountered by people of who were not Black (participant spoke; and normalcy of stereotypes was described by participants as “nothing new” or simply “being used to it" (p. 902). The persistence theme was described when participants discussed how they persisted through stereotypes and adverse academic environments. The concepts of persistence were “confronting stereotypes, ignoring stereotypes, dispelling stereotypes, and alleviating pressure” (p. 902). The advice theme derived due to the participants stating that they would offer advice to their incoming Black successors, including speaking up when they were offended and being true to who they were without feeling the need to conform to the disparate environment (p. 903).

Many of the participants witnessed the preconceived notions that dominant races have about the intelligence of Black males in education (Boyd, & Mitchell, 2018). Participants who served on a diversity committee at the institution spoke of the assumptions being made that they were studying prelaw to go on to be Civil Rights attorneys and not to be corporate lawyers like the White students who served on the same committee (Boyd, & Mitchell, 2018). Other students also gave accounts of being treated as “exceptional Negro.” Due to the preconceived notion that Black males are uneducated and unintelligent, when the Black male student is doing well, then he is “exceptional” because he is different from the “norm” (p. 903). Because of this, one student stated, “there are a lot of social interactions that I kind of stay away from because of stereotypes,” which contributes to the persistence of barriers for Black Males in higher education (p.903).

In addition to encountering prejudice, microaggressions were experienced by the participants. One participant shared his experience with what was perceived as repeated insults by another student coworker. He stated that his and another Black coworker's names were always confused by one of the White coworkers, but none of the many White coworkers experienced the same confusion (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). In addition, the same participant experienced microaggression from one of the religious organizations on campus when being greeted. He stated that when greeted by one of the other non-Black members, they immediately followed with an unusual handshake that included a back of-the-hand slap as though the Black member would know what this handshake was and that it was appropriate to do so (p.903).

The participants of this study all agreed that they found solace in association with other minorities on campus, which brings to light the importance of having minority representation on college campuses. Same-race administrators and faculty provided the participants with support, guidance, and mentorship, which aided the students in their college experience (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018).

Minority Representation in the Faculty

Faculty have an integral part in the institution's education, research, and service functions, from teaching and learning to knowledge development to university governance (Moreno et al., 2006). Although many studies have shown the importance of employing racial and ethnic diversity in faculty members and efforts to do so on college campuses, other studies suggest there have been minor changes in the quantity of underrepresented minority faculty members on college campuses (Turner et al., 1999).

Hiring and Retention of Minority Faculty and Staff

Lack of diversity within a post-secondary campus "limits the educational experiences available for students and hinders the capacity of the institution to fulfill its mission" (Finley et al., 2001). Racial diversity and the consequent "challenges and benefits of multiculturalism in higher education have been explored through much research" (Brown, 2004). In a study done by Diggs et al., (2009), the barriers that minority faculty experience during the tenure process at a predominately White Research Institution were explored through a qualitative study. In this study, four non-tenured faculty of color (two males, two females, two African Americans, and two Latinos participated in focus groups to answer the following research questions: "What do participants identify as support for and barriers to them during the tenure process? How do faculty of color process and experience the diversity and equity activities of Pinnacle University (PU) and the Department of Education (DOE)? How do diversity and equity activities contribute to the professional growth and development of participating faculty of color"? (Diggs et al., 2009). In a pursuit to fulfill its mission, PU had created a plan to recruit and retain more faculty and students of color, as well as professional development that supports diverse issues (p. 319).

The results of this qualitative study included the following themes: Opportunity cost, Frustrations, Coping Strategies, System Changes, Mentoring, Safe Space, Academic Identity, and Confronting Diversity (Diggs et al., 2009). With the safe space theme, the participants spoke of their challenges discussing diversity issues with White faculty, which caused the minority faculty to be frustrated (p. 322). Faculty of color expressed dismay with working with non-minority faculty on diversity issues due to the impersonal experience and naive rebuttal (p. 322). When the participants spoke of mentoring, discussions on how a cultural match between mentor and mentee could be helpful in their faculty development sessions were mentioned. Additionally, a more diverse selection of mentors could add more development and support for minority faculty (p. 324). In the academic identity theme, participants shared the cultural dissonance between the institution's culture and the cultural backgrounds of the faculty of color (p. 325). While some felt that onboarding minority faculty was "groundbreaking" for the institution's push towards diversity, the minority faculty experienced cultural dissonance because they did not want to disturb the rooted identity that was already in the institution and cause non-minority faculty to resist the change that cultural representation that the minority faculty may institute (p. 325). Confronting Diversity: The Dean and Department of Education at Pinnacle University designed a commitment to diversity to recruit and retain faculty of color and provide professional development to support diversity (p. 327). Although the commitment to diversity was necessary for change, faculty of color still found themselves "confronting" diversity due to the lack of participation in the diversity activities of some senior faculty (p.327).

Some minority faculty felt that the dominant race viewed their talent as subpar. This research suggested "that a commitment to diversity should attend to both the intellectual and emotional interests of faculty of color" (p. 329). It was also recommended that Critical Race

Theory be used to "examine lasting inequalities that exist in schools" (p. 329). Counter-storytelling, focus groups, and interviews introduce voices and experiences that may otherwise be unrepresented in education (p. 329). Arguably, subordinated voices can establish counter-stories that conflict with regular social constructions (p. 330). Additionally, leadership should acknowledge the urgency of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work on institution campuses and ensure that the work leads to inclusive results. (p. 331).

Critical Race Theory

Racial identity theories debunk the notion that race should remain dormant in student development theories while highlighting "the role of race and the extent to which it is incorporated into self-concept" (Patton et al., 2016). Critical Race Theory (CRT) includes the concepts that "race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice but also something embedded in legal systems and policies" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The basic tenets of CRT derive from the framework for legal analysis created by scholars, lawyers, and activists such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The late Alan Freeman taught at Buffalo Law School exposed many legalized racisms that existed in the U.S. Supreme Court and wrote about it in many literary articles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)

Critical race theory (CRT) came about in 1970 by activists, lawyers, and legal scholars who realized that the civil rights movement in the 1960s had stalled and was no longer effective in combating the ongoing racial issues (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Although the civil rights movement emphasized incrementalism and intermittent progression, CRT interrupted that standard by questioning the foundation of the liberal order (p. 3). During the early to mid-1980s, CRT "critiqued the law, society, and race and grew to be an expansive and credible movement

that is both inner and cross-disciplinary, particularly regarding education" (p. 13). One of the objectives of (CRT) was to raise awareness of White supremacy, race, and racism in many social systems, including education (Gillborn, 2005).

Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality as it refers to multiple forms of discrimination that ultimately formed systemic racial oppression (Crenshaw, 1995). Critical Race Theory scholarship also attempts to bring awareness to the disguisable racism that may be ingrained in many policies and laws in the U.S. that purposely hold influential constraints against minorities and the minoritized (Patton et al., 2016). Bell is one of the more prominent CRT theorists and is notable for his interest-convergence theory and his contributions to the work of other developing law scholars (p. 6). This theory holds that the only way Black people achieve civil liberties is when Black interest-converges with Whites (p. 9).

Critical Race Theory has spread across many disciplines in society. There are five tenets that CRT scholars subscribe to that support the racial inequality doctrine: "counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism" (Hiraldo, 2018). Each of these tenets attempts to disturb the notion that racism, oppression, and microaggression is prevalent in societal norms, even in higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The counter-storytelling tenet of CRT allows the narratives and stories of underrepresented races to be communicated to audiences that may not be aware of their oppressive experiences (Benjamin & Laughter, 2023). Many qualitative literary studies have used CRT as a framework to allow students to give their experiences and measure how it affects their college experience (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The tenet of counter-storytelling also supports the work of addressing campus climates and intentional efforts around diversity and

inclusion (Linley, 2018). As institutions aim to create diverse campuses by making education accessible to more minority students, the lack of minority representation in faculty diminishes the efforts of institutions to retain underrepresented students by providing adequate support (Hiraldo, n.d.). Many victims of racial discrimination are not vocal about their experiences out of fear of repercussions or having their concerns ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-storytelling gives voice to those who have experienced discrimination without weaponizing the storyteller and gives a name to discriminatory behavior in higher education (Hiraldo, n.d.).

The permanence of racism suggests "that racism controls the political, societal, and economic realms of U.S. society" (Magdaleno & Magdaleno, 2021; Hiraldo, 2010). Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is infused in U.S. civilization and attempts to make this apparent to policymakers (Hiraldo, n.d.). Wilder (2013) speaks on the permanence of racism when discussing the history of Ivy League colleges and slavery. Historic Ivy League buildings are symbolic of the labor of slavery at institutions that then excluded Black people from attending their institutions (Wilder, 2013). When higher education policymakers attempt to create diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) provisions to advance minority access without acknowledging the genetic discrimination that can be translated to racism, then the DEI efforts will fail (Smith, 2020). In addition, CRT asserts that the dominant culture will only create equality to advance the non-dominant culture if it also benefits them, which can give efforts to a racist undertone (Patton et al., 2016). An example of this would be how affirmative action has been disproportionately beneficial to White women and not the protected classes that it was designed to protect (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2020). The suggested reasoning behind the inequity of affirmative action is that the provision was enacted by the non-minority people, so accordingly,

the undertone would not primarily be in the best interest of the minorities but would also benefit non-minorities (p. 71).

The interest convergence tenet was one of Bell's more controversial topics. As previously mentioned, interest convergence is when the interest of the dominant class weighs heavily in the policy or provision that is meant to create equality or advancement for minorities. For example, the interest convergences that came about when Executive Order 10925, issued by President John F. Kennedy regarding equal employment in government contracts, included the provision that stated, "take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin" (Ginsberg, 1961). Federal contractors required affirmative action plans that detailed the practical steps to address the underemployment of minoritized groups (p. 141). This includes "actions taken to ensure equal treatment of minorities in recruitment, compensation, and advancement" (p. 141). However, affirmative action has been shown to only adhere to the part of the provision that allows the protected class of women over the age of 40 to fulfill the required protected class (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2020).

Critical Race Theory holds that the Whiteness as property tenet is a derivative of White supremacy (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In higher education, Eurocentric norms that were established because of slavery and segregation still manifest today. Leadership and faculty positions in higher education still lack people of color, which is why the curriculum has "overwhelming Whiteness" (pg. 62). The majority of African Americans who earn a doctoral in higher education will work in administration and not as faculty; henceforth, Black doctorates do not become part of the diversity that's needed in the curriculum which means that the White race continues to own the curriculum (p. 55). Whiteness as property has been an asset to the dominant

race due to the historical ownership of people, as well as the perpetuation of power that they possess (Hiraldo, n.d.).

Society has the tendency to invoke neutrality in policies to appease the masses. However, scholars have concluded that colorblindness only allows racist policies to stay in existence rather than confronting them (Hiraldo, n.d.). The Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970s exposed education policies that were racially sensitive, including desegregation and affirmative action, that addressed racism (Patton et al., 2016). Addressing systemic racism in higher education requires an acknowledgment of the discrimination and microaggression that are built in the history of higher education; henceforth, using colorblindness only perpetuates the problem without accountability (Lin, 2022).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), White faculty members hold 74% of the total faculty professorship. Lack of racial diversity among faculty members has resulted in the control of the curriculum of the dominant race, consequently resulting in scholarship that is not inclusive of minority influence. White supremacy has also been recognized in the promotion and tenure process, which has led to many Supreme Court cases (Patton, 2016). With more representation of minority faculty, students can continue in higher education (Allen, 1992). Several studies have proven that the primary influence of minority students' departure is heavily due to lack of representation (p. 32).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Factors contributing to minority student retention and faculty representation of student identities have been identified in previous studies (Genheimer, 2016; Hurtado et. al., 1998; Bowman & Denson, 2022). This study amplified student voices in this area of study by examining how minority graduate students and faculty perceived representation in their current graduate program and how they would conceptualize ideal representation. As demonstrated in the literature review, the lack of representation in course curricula and faculty in higher education contributes to the persistence of minority students. Chapter two also discussed the overall retention of minority students, specifically that of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, due to those populations having a lower retention than White students. This chapter sets out the methodology that addresses the following research questions:

- How do minority graduate students at an MSI conceptualize the representation of their identities in the classroom?
- How do faculty conceptualize the representation of minoritized students' identities in the classroom?
- How do minority student and faculty conceptualizations of representation in the classroom align, and where do they diverge?

Additionally, this chapter lays out the study's methodology, including identifying and defining critical elements of the study and discussing procedures. Examining the perspectives of students and faculty may improve the representation of student identities in the graduate classroom and leverage that representation for student success.

Method

This qualitative study employed co-constructed focus groups and individual interviews with postgraduate students and faculty to examine the factors contributing to minority students' representation and the perception of representation in graduate faculty. Co-constructed interviews act as facilitators to engage with participants in a conversational situation but "foreground the role of the interviewee in the construction and negotiation of meaning" (Dwyer et al., 2016). Additionally, co-constructed interviewing is an "intimate, relational, and flexible method of in-depth, conversational interviewing that focuses on facilitating and examining the collaborative meaning-making processes of telling and listening" (Patti & Ellis, 2017). This latter method was used when the availability of the participants was unified to have a shared platform for expressing their experiences as students and as faculty.

Setting

Data were collected from a graduate program within the National College of Education (NCE), at National Louis University (NLU) in Chicago, Illinois. National Louis University is a commuter college with the federal designation of Hispanic Service Institution (HSI). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classifies NLU as a private, non-profit institution offering Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in research/scholarship and professional practice ("National Louis University – Chicago," n.d.).

The total student enrollment in 2021 was 7,315 (3,607 undergraduate; 3,708 graduate enrollment); demographically, the gender of the graduate population was 79% identified as female and 20% as male ("College Navigator-National Louis University," n.d.). Seventy-two percent of NLU's undergraduate population is collectively Hispanic and Black students, and 42%

of the graduate population comprises the same population. ("College Navigator-National Louis University," n.d.).

Participants

The participants for this study included seven students pursuing their Master's degree or Educational Specialist degree, and six faculty from a graduate program in the National College of Education (NCE). With the intent to create heterogeneity in the responses, a Student Screening Questionnaire (Appendix B) and a Faculty Screening Questionnaire (Appendix A) were given to identify race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as the specifics of the graduate program. Minority graduate students were the ideal population for this study due to the diverse racial minority demographics; however, due to the low participation in the prescreening process, no students were eliminated from participating in the study.

Instrument

Minority-Serving Institutions ensure that students from underrepresented races and ethnicities have a positive college experience (Harmon, 2012). This study's focus group and interview protocols focused on three main topics: exploring how minority graduate students conceptualize representation, how graduate faculty conceptualize representation, and how the two groups are similar and divergent. The student and faculty protocol used open-ended questions that attempt to explore students' diverse experiences in the classroom and get to the heart of understanding what representation looks and feels like. Previous research suggests that the lack of representation of student identities in the curriculum and among faculty members has added to negative college experiences for minority students.

Research has also shown that the faculty members at Minority Serving Institutions are still primarily non-minority and present a faculty-student representation imbalance (Scott et al.,

2022). The faculty questions (Appendix C) attempted to discover how faculty members ensure representation for minority students when there is an imbalance of representation in the classroom. In addition, it was important to understand the perspective of how graduate faculty perceive the representation of student identities in the classroom and across curricula.

Data Collection

In compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at National Louis University, a Letter of Support was provided by the chair of a program in the National College of Education, who then distributed both student and faculty screening questionnaires. Two rounds of screening questionnaires were distributed over the course of 3 weeks to recruit participants. Once all questionnaires were received, it was determined that all participants were fit for this research. Data collected within this inquiry generated two focus groups, one of graduate students and one of graduate faculty from the same program at National Louis University.

Procedure

According to Patti and Ellis (2017), "co-constructed interviewing is an intimate and flexible method of conversational interviewing that focuses on facilitating and examining the collaborative meaning-making processes of telling and listening." Also, co-constructing allows participants to demonstrate their vulnerabilities and intimate understanding of the student and faculty experience, rapport can be established with the participants. During each interview, distributed semi-structured questions were asked to attempt to co-facilitate the interview through shared responses. At the same time, there was a degree of flexibility in the line of questioning, probing, and follow-up. Co-constructed focus group interviews also allowed discovery organically rather than adopting a rigid "your turn, my turn" approach (p. 2).

The students and faculty were recruited from a Master's level graduate program. Before recruiting for the focus groups, a prescreening questionnaire was used to qualify the desired participants. Because this study aimed to understand how graduate minority students conceptualize representation, racially minority students were the targeted demographic group; however, the study did not eliminate any participants. These prescreen questionnaires collected demographics to create heterogeneity in responses, which were subsequently used to establish diversity in the response. To create that diversity, a pre-questionnaire asked demographics about race and gender. Qualified student participants were classified as racial minorities due to their potential experience with representation. Gender was used to create heterogeneity in the responses. Due to the likelihood of non-minority faculty having racially minority students, the Graduate faculty sought to consist of minority and non-minority racial groups. Google Forms were used to collect the data.

Data Analysis

After the focus groups were conducted, participants were engaged at two specific points in data analysis: review of and feedback on initial themes and coding and review of and feedback on the initial model drafts. The focus groups were recorded via Zoom for transcribing and clarification. In-depth focus group discussions and questions were used to process and detect the themes. The Zoom interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word using the Dictate-Transcribe and then downloaded, reviewed, and edited for accuracy. The transcripts were then uploaded to Atlas.ti for coding. Multiple rounds of coding were administered for accuracy. After the final codes were discovered, the codebook was created. Because the themes are invisible perceptions and experiences embedded in the respondents' experiences, the questions attempted to extract them. From the coding and categorization processes, themes were created. Once the themes were

created, the researcher connected the themes with the theory to determine the contribution to the research. The themes were then reviewed and used to create the models of representation for the students and the faculty. The themes for the students and faculty were then combined to find any common themes to build a combined model for representation.

According to Creswell & Miller (2000), member checking is "valuable for enhancing research credibility, establishing trustworthiness, and building relationships with study participants." The final representation models were co-constructed and then presented to the participants along with their transcripts. After two rounds of member checking via email over the course of one week were done, one participant responded with no discrepancies. The findings and models of representation are listed in Chapter Four.

Confidentiality Statement

Participants' names have not been published in the study. Participation in this study was voluntary, and refusing to participate did not result in consequences. When participants are mentioned or quoted as individuals, aliases are used to protect their identity. Zoom focus groups and interviews were recorded only for the researcher's analysis and theming.

Positionality Statement

With the understanding that analysis and findings can be articulated based on my position and standpoints, I acknowledge that the conceptualizations of the representation of minority students may present bias. The predisposition stems from my experiences as an African American graduate student at a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). I have personal experiences of the positive and negative effects of representation in higher education. As a graduate student in a Master's program, I did not have any African-American faculty, which led me not to have a good college experience. I was only interested in completing my assignments and completing the

degree. Although working with people from other races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds helped challenge the views I was accustomed to, I did not feel that those feelings were reciprocated.

As a doctoral candidate at a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), I know that a good, well-rounded committee includes faculty who offer support by providing collegial expertise and prowess in my research topic. My current committee comprises of two White women, , and an African American male. These diverse perspectives will be needed to gain a comprehensive understanding and expand my thinking, challenge my perspectives, and enable more creative and targeted solutions. I can identify with the importance of representation, which is reflected in my work.

In addition to being a student, I am also a mother of two children who have shown how representation has positively impacted their academic decisions. My son is a third-year Computer Science major at an MSI in Chicago, IL, and has expressed how he felt that he had no representation in his program and did not feel very confident in confiding in his professors about any struggles that he was experiencing. Once joining Black organizations on campus, he began to see other Black men from different professional sectors and felt better about his career choices after completing college. My daughter, who is a junior in high school at a high school that is predominantly white, has decided to study Neuropsychology because she attended a career fair and met Black women in STEM and is now excited about going to college. The representations that have helped my children to succeed in academia have strongly encouraged my scholarly research into the importance of representation for minority students.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how minoritized graduate students and faculty members perceive the representation of student identities in the classrooms. Additionally, the study explored how those groups would conceptualize the ideal representation of student identities in the classroom. After collecting data via qualitative focus groups and interviews, the researcher and study participants co-constructed models of representation of underrepresented student and faculty identities in a graduate program. Participants shared their experiences through focus groups or interviews Data was collected to explore the following research questions:

- How do minority graduate students at a MSI conceptualize the representation of their identity in the classroom?
- How do faculty conceptualize representation of minoritized students' identities in the classroom?
- How do student and faculty conceptualizations of representation in the classroom align, and where do they diverge?

Diversity and racial identity researchers have homed in on the importance of representation and what it means to minority groups (Cross, 1991). Previous research showed that "African American racial identity within the context of this group's stigmatized status in American society, with little regard for the role of culture" (Sellers et al., 1998a). Participant responses from this study aligned with the dimensions of the Multiple Dimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI).

Data from focus groups and interviews was analyzed to find codes and major themes that supported the creation of individual student and faculty models of representation and a combined conceptualized model of representation. The three major themes identified mutually by students and faculty were diversity, representation, and inclusion. Quotes from both groups will be offered as evidence to demonstrate how their thoughts and experiences align with the MMRI and, later in this chapter, how models were co-constructed.

This research explores experiences surrounding the representation of minoritized students' identities and how ideal representation is conceptualized by graduate students and faculty. This study is significant due to the increased number of students of color who are entering graduate programs to meet the criteria of the demanding workforce, but the turnover for minority students is still much higher than that of non-minority students. Addressing this issue requires foci on student needs and student and faculty perspectives. The faculty and student protocols (Appendices C&D) asked questions to explore how students or faculty view the current state of representation in their program and how they would conceptualize ideal representation. Through these discussions, a model of ideal representation from the student perspective, a model from the faculty perspective, and a joint model were created.

The Participants

Prescreening questionnaires were sent twice over three weeks and yielded 10 students and 8 faculty responses. Seven of the student volunteers and five of the faculty volunteers were able to schedule participation in either a focus group or an interview. Figure one gives a breakdown of the participants' demographics.

Figure 1

Participants Demographic

Participant Alias	Race	Gender
FACULTY PARTICIPANTS		
Professor Davidson Focus Group	White	Female
Professor Wonder Focus Group	Black	Female
Professor X Focus Group	White	Female
Professor Ellis Interview	White	Female
Professor Ditka Interview	White	Male
STUDENT PARTICIPANTS		
Keith Focus Group 1	Black	Male
Mary Focus Group 1	Black	Female
Shannon Focus Group 1	White	Female
Kiki Focus Group 2	Black	Female
May Focus Group 2	Black	Female
Jacob Interview	Black	Male
Frances Interview	Black	Female

Findings

Two rounds of coding were conducted during the data analysis. The transcripts from all focus groups and interviews were uploaded in Atlas.ti and AI was used to generate codes. The first round of coding found 427 codes for students and 377 for faculty. In the second round, codes were condensed and eliminated, resulting in 35 student codes and 27 for faculty. The final codes were grouped into themes that supported the theoretical framework and the research questions. From further review from the researcher of the categories and coding, three themes emerged: diversity, representation, and inclusion.

Diversity

According to Chen (2017), "diversity is a transformative tool that aligns with the mission of postsecondary institutions to contribute to the betterment of society. Institutions that lack diversity place limitations on the experiences and learning of students" (p. 18). However, individuals may have different perspectives depending on individual backgrounds. Diversity issues have moved from an inessential position to a more central concern of higher education faculty and students, which is why it should be the focal point for higher education (Brown, 2004). Shannon, a student participant who self-identified as a White woman, gave her perspective on the diversity in her current program:

> "My current program is wonderfully diverse… except for gender. We have no men in our cohort at all which are professors. Every time we get a new term, I comment on how smaller the group is and that there are no guys. They say it's very unique, which I find interesting because there is a perception that men go into administration more than women and I'm kind of glad that that's changing up a bit. It's a very diverse group. We

have African American, Latinx, Hispanic, and, oh, and a South Korean. But I think it's pretty diverse, and it's really great."

Keith, an African American male student in the same program as Shannon but another cohort, also shared his perspectives on program diversity:

> The program is majority White… and as far as the other ethnicities…aren't as prevalent, I know that in my current cohort…there are about…total males, probably about 3-4, maybe total males. In the cohort (as a whole), you know… there are no more than 10 total for sure…And as far as Black males, there are only 2…there aren't a lot of males, period…. As far as like their cultures and, you know, backgrounds diversity, it's, you know, majority White, but you know only a few Black people total."

May, who has self-identified as an African American female, shared her vision for an ideal graduate program, saying:

> "We need more minority teachers or professors. We don't have enough minority professors. I would like for our class to be more diversified when we are putting the classes together and not only does that mean just having more African Americans but more from other cultures and not just White students and professors."

Preparing students for the diverse society that they live in will require college campuses to enforce efforts to actively diversify their faculty members (Hurtado et al., 1998). These efforts are unsuccessful in campus diversity efforts as minority faculty remain underrepresented, and their scholarships still need to be available (p. 8). Faculty of color could expose the effects of lack of diversity that may be subtle throughout the institution while providing suggestions for future diversity (p. 8). Professor Wonder, who is an African American woman and professor at NLU stated:

> "And I like when you said representation, you made me think about, like, as I walked the halls, at our buildings that we don't have…I don't see minority representation. Most recently, I was able to get some students who are from this belonging project that we were working on with one of the districts where someone who's a graduate is now working, and so I have some of the students art work…but I don't think we (African Americans) are represented in the texts or in what you see in the environment."

The faculty participants that were in the focus group with Professor Wonder agreed with the lack of diversity in their program; however, Professor Davidson, who identified as a White woman professor, stated:

> "That is something that we've worked on a lot over the last few years, like we made a conscious decision…. (Alias Professor X) knows this because she was part of our work, but to talk to students about how well they saw themselves represented. And to sort of find out, we have made a conscious effort… If you'd asked me five years ago, I would have answered the same way... But we have made a conscious effort to do that. Now, the caveat I have is that I have tried very hard to find text, genuinely to find textbooks that sort of cover the content area that are written by Black or Brown researchers or educators. And I think the textbook world doesn't have enough representation."

Representation

This study focuses on the representation of minoritized student identities in the faculty, classroom materials, and peer groups, and how students and faculty members conceptualize ideal representation. The underrepresentation of students and faculty members from diverse backgrounds in colleges and universities perpetuates existing inequalities and limits all students' learning opportunities (Alvaré, 2018). The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI)

is a “blend of conceptualizations from many existing models of African American racial identity” (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI defines “racial identity as that part of the person’s self-concept that is related to their membership within a race. It is associated with one’s significance on race in defining oneself and the individual’s interpretations of what it means to be an African American” (p. 20).

When Professor Davidson was asked how she felt minoritized students are represented in faculty, curriculum, and course materials in the graduate program, she stated:

> “Representation….It makes a big difference to students. That's one of the things we learned is like, you know, you can bring in these articles, and you can bring in these books, but how about you bring in some faculty that look like us? Or my program is, it's just three people. And it's all three full time faculty. And we're all White, White women. So as (Professor X) said, we have made an effort to find Black and Latinx adjuncts to teach for us. And we have done that...I mean, it's, people who notice it. In a good way, you know, but I definitely think our faculty, our full-time faculty, is….that diverse. I do think it's getting better. I mean, a lot better than it was when I first started…. It's not diverse. Not enough.”

The MMRI has four dimensions of the racial identity of African American racial identity: “the salience of identity, the centrality of the identity, racial regard associated with the identity, and the racial ideology in which the person holds African Americans” (Sellers et al., 1998b). Racial salience and centrality address the “significance of race in the individual’s self-definition, while racial regard and ideology address the meaning that the individual accredits to being an African American” (p. 24).

Racial salience is described as the measure of how much race is prevalent in certain situations or times (p. 24). Inter-group bias has shown “that making group identities salient has consequences for the way individuals respond toward members of both the in-group and out-group” (p. 25). When speaking to Kiki about how she viewed the representation in her program, the racial salience in her group and out-group reactions were shown as she stated:

> “In my cohort of 20, there are approximately five African American students. With the five, it does still give the climate of, you know, we're (African Americans) the marginalized. We're lower on the totem pole. We don't know as much, kind of feel. That does make you feel very uncomfortable. It makes you feel like you don't belong. Like you're not good enough because you're not teaching in the suburbs or, you know, your school doesn't have the resources, or your buildings don't look as great as ours, or your neighborhoods aren't safe.”

Sellers et al. (1998) gave an example of racial salience as it pertains to an African American person being in a restaurant that only had White patrons. While race may be salient for one Black person, it may not be for another person(p. 25). The individual who views race as salient in this situation may view the environment as hostile or may feel uncomfortable that there is no representation of their identity present. As a result, for example, experiences like bad service or rudeness may be internalized as racism (p. 25). When May was asked about the representation in peers in her current program, she stated:

> “So, it's me and the other lady in our class, and it feels more like we're pouring our hearts out to them and teaching them who we are as a people or defending our culture a lot in the class. They're very distant from us and don't like interacting with us often. So, in our classes, it is pretty much more clique-ish. You know? So, when we have to partner up

> they would prefer not to partner up with the minorities in the classroom. The minorities in our classroom are only two Blacks. We have no Hispanic and then everybody else is White. So it hasn't been a great experience."

May went on to state, "I can't wait until the cohort is done so that I would never have to really deal with them anymore," which is an indication of race being salient as she associated her racial membership as the reason why the White students might not be welcoming to her.

Racial centrality refers to the "degree to which a person normatively defines themselves as it regards race" (Sellers et al., 1998b). The difference between racial salience and centrality is that centrality is not just applicable in certain situations but has more of a universal perspective of self in respect to race (p. 25). An indication of racial centrality can be whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept or if there are other defining characteristics, such as gender (p.26). The conceptualization of centrality is a "hierarchical ranking of different identities regarding their proximity to the individual's core definition of self and representation of self " (p. 26). When asked how he would conceptualize an ideal represented graduate program, Jacob stated:

> "Education is dominated by women. We know that, and I think a way in which we can incorporate more Black men like myself into this program is having some form of pipeline at the different colleges at the different universities…Like, hey, this is a way in which we can give back and then having more men be vocal about in the realm of education, be vocal about…this is the way that we can give back. This is the way that we can help build our next generation. This is a way that we can increase, you know, positivity within the communities in which we serve and which, you know, schools are in, and so that's why I think we could definitely increase the number."

In this response, Jacob shows that gender is a central defining factor to race and how representation in a graduate program means having more gender identity along with racial identity to be better prepared to teach the next generation of students.

Racial regard dimension "refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgment of their race in terms of positive and negative reactiveness" (Sellers et al., 1998b). The regard dimension "consists of private and public; private regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively towards African Americans and their membership in that group" (p. 26). Public regard refers to "the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively" (p. 26). When discussing the representation of faculty, staff, and peers in their graduate program, some participants gave their perspectives on what being a minority meant to them and also how they felt the non-minority faculty and peers viewed them. Frances shared her perception of how African Americans are viewed in K-12 academic spaces and how it continues in higher education:

> "What are you representing? So that's why I think representation matters. So, we don't really see ourselves. You have two Black teachers, but 83% of your population is Black. But your janitorial staff and your lunchroom staff is Black. Because sometimes people, you know, really don't have contact with people of color and will look at us low in institutions, right? So, they are the clerks in school in the office, the custodial staff, or something like that. But you don't really see them as faculty. So, I think that's why I'm saying it's important because you don't really see that, and they look down on us for that reason."

Racial ideology is composed of "individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to the way they feels Blacks should act" Sellers et al., 1998a). Ideology represents the "person's

philosophy on the ways in which African Americans should live and interact with society" (p. 28). Racial ideology has four philosophies:

1. "Nationalist philosophy is the viewpoint that emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black
2. Oppressed minority philosophy is an aspect that focuses on the similarities between African Americans and other oppressed groups;
3. Assimilation philosophy looks at the similarities between African Americans and the rest of American society;
4. Humanist philosophy has a point of view that emphasizes all humans' commonalities (p.28).

Although some individuals can possess one primary ideology, most people hold all or some ideological philosophies that vary across areas and situations and are applicable when measuring representation in certain settings (p. 28). The participants from both groups were asked to share their conceptualization of an ideal graduate program that was representative and supportive of those with minoritized identities. Professor Wonder gave an answer that aligned with the dimension of racial ideology when she said:

> "I think that things are blind spots. Because there are blind spots, you don't know how to represent us properly. Like you don't know, you can really be hit like that car. There's kind of hidden on the side. It's a blind spot, and everybody has some. And so, like finding a way to uncover what those blind spots are, and then dealing with it in a way that's non-threatening to White counterparts. I keep wanting to do it in a non-threatening way. And then there are other colleagues of mine who don't look like me; there's no way to tell them that they did something. But I just don't think that it works that way. When people are undoing a whole bunch of stuff that has been a part of them, when they don't even

know that they have that blind spot, but there's a part of them. We're writing a chapter, and I am writing a chapter on the incorporation of critical race theory, and what she called it is there's anti-heroes. Like when you say I don't see color. That's the anti-hero. When you ignore the differences between what happens in various zip codes in Illinois in terms of schools. So, you go to a school in Englewood, you go to a school in Plainfield, and you see two different… they're schools, both in the same state, maybe 25 miles from each other. But I think bringing the disparities, the big disparities, to light would be how I would start if I had a dream thing because I just don't think people who don't represent us know how bad it is in some places."

Professor Ellis stated:

> "So myself and (name masked), who is a White male close to retirement age, and me being a White female, we're not representing as well as I mean, yes, we, you know we do need more people teaching in the program."

She also recognized that the relationship between graduate students and their chairperson and committee members is linked to students' successful completion of their capstone and program of study. Professor Ellis goes on to say:

> "A drawback for our main courses, however, especially at the doctoral level, our students have committees… We start working with their doctoral chair and committee member in their second term of the three-year program. So, we have them develop people to choose their own committee members based on subject matter and find an expert who has subject matter experts and/or other connections that they have… from underrepresented races…they're being really vocal about what they want. To have that representation and for them to have that on their committees because we don't have it as much. We have a

> big group of students who say “I have a sorority sister who has her doctorate, and we work closely together. I'd love her to be on my committee.” And of course, it’s because they're underrepresented for the most part.”

Professor Ditka explained that another Black colleague of his helped him understand why representation of minority identities is important by saying:

> “…he was from Flint, MI. He was Black, and he told me... “As honest and fair and just as you try to be, you'll never, ever, ever see things exactly through the lens of a Black person.” And you know what? I never challenged that. I just believed him. I just believed him. And so that's kind of the way I approach things, and I know that people of color need to be represented by other people of color.”

Shannon who feels that “all of my faculty, they have been amazing,” also went on to say, “but representation has been limited.”

Inclusion

Higher education “has been challenged to develop policies that actively promote access and completion of diverse, underrepresented populations” (Leake & Stodden, 2014). A sense of belonging has been shown to add to students’ learning, personal development, and overall success in higher education (Mendoza & Venables, 2023). Students from minoritized groups are at greater risk of feeling isolated and unwelcome (Taff & Clifton, 2022). Faculty and students both have attested that the lack of belonging and inclusion among marginalized identity groups has aided in the exposure of racism, stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion (p.123). Student and faculty participants also perceived that there would be less discrimination and bias if the institution made intentional efforts to improve diversity and inclusion. When Keith spoke of

the feeling of inclusion that he experienced with a professor who had a diverse background, and stated:

> "I have a professor now (name masked)…she's really keen on inclusivity and making sure that conversations are being had…whether that's looking at different cultures and backgrounds, and climates, and making them a conversation in class, versus making or hitting these points and making them part of the curriculum. But I think that the personal experiences, specifically the reason why I brought up (name masked), is how the personal experience experiences that she implements in the classroom… this helped tailor what she wants us to gain from the coursework, right, from the case studies, right? It gives us a different perspective. So each student, whether White, Black, Brown, can actually feel ok,..this is what I'm supposed to take from this case study. This is how I should approach it...this case study is not telling us how to approach it, but just giving us a different viewpoint outside of our own before we address the other coursework. I did not get that from other faculty, which can make you feel excluded."."

Transitioning from diversity to inclusion will require an acknowledgment of the social injustice and implicit biases that affect student belonging (Puritty et al., 2017). An inclusive institution environment allows all students and faculty to have a valued voice and see other races and ethnicities represented in the curriculum and coursework (p. 1102). Keith was asked how representation would look in an ideal graduate program, and he placed a lot of emphasis on diversity and inclusion:

> "There will be a series of videos that I would like for the students to watch before the class, and these videos will touch on topics such as inclusivity, diversity, collaboration, and equity. There would not be any case studies either. Instead, we would be able to

choose a topic that involves diversity and inclusivity. Whichever is right, you'll be able to choose the topic. If I look at my overall classroom, I hope to admit students…I would hope to be in a classroom that has that that has peers from all ethnicities, right? I would also like for the instructor to be someone who is accepting of all genders, backgrounds, and ethnic cultures. And who willingly opens the floor for conversations that need to be had inside of your classroom and everyone is included.”.”

Professor Wonder also spoke about the unintentional exclusions that affect inclusivity within the institution and how she feels responsible for illuminating those exclusions that minority students and faculty may experience:

> “I have started to think about students who don't look like me, and the situation in class is to believe that everybody is doing the best they can with the tools they’ve been presented. Everybody's doing their best. They're showing up with the tools that they have. They are showing up from North, wherever they come from, with the data, they it's I don't think anybody is coming saying, I really don't like Black people. I don't think that is not for the majority. I think people who don’t look like me are showing up with the best they can. And so my job is to kind of figure out what is that best, and how to move the needle a little bit without taking them as they are and understanding that they are doing their best right now. And so something they say might be offensive or racist, but I, I would have to pull them to the side to say it. Most of the time, people know not to say it, and probably most of the time don’t realize they are not including minorities in their decisions.”

Professor X explains how she recognizes the limitation of inclusion in the program and would like to see a change, but there are several limitations in creating the change:

> "…we have no training. There's no training in our college. We've not gone through anything. We have a small group of like-minded folks that are trying to work on things. But there's no training, there are no resources that are put towards training for diversity and inclusion. There are minimal opportunities…And they're trying to make sure that we have time at our big NCE meetings to do this work. But it's truncated, like, we've got to go, go on to the next thing, and go into the end. So, we don't ever have time to dig deep into inclusion. And so that's a deeper, you know, that's a deeper problem than that, that is prevalent, like across our college."

With the emphasis on diversity alone, inclusion can sometimes get lost in the agenda (Puritty et al., 2017). Inclusion addresses the implicit biases of gender, race, culture, and other orientations that can be ingrained due to historical stereotypes (p. 1101). May spoke on the need for inclusion in the course work and how Professor Wonder was the only faculty member who recognized how the case studies were not inclusive of all people:

> "We're doing case studies, but it's just within this last class, this one we're doing now because I'm doing a case study on equity and diversity…but it's not geared towards equity for African Americans, it's not geared towards equity for anybody. She gave us a choice whether or not we include people who are disabled and equity for the LGBTQ+ community. So, when she's asking us to look at case studies, we're looking at case studies. Not just to include one group of people but for all. She says all the culture…she's throwing everybody and everything in there. Those kinds of case studies we're looking at involve diversity and inclusion."."

Professor Ellis noted the importance of having inclusion in the curriculum and encouraged underrepresented students to embrace their identities by acknowledging the microaggressions that may not be recognizable to non-minority faculty:

> ”At first, I hadn't noticed any challenges. But one of the students in her assignment said, “As a Black woman, I'm feeling I this is, I cannot answer some of these questions because they written in a way that is threatening to me.” And it was so true when I reread them, and they were coming from a White perspective, for sure. And how do you deal with it? How do you deal with assignments that don’t treat you well or that have microaggressions towards you? Some discussions around why this is not inappropriate or which questions here might be offensive or not applicable or written from a perspective. Other than a DEI perspective. So, I love learning from my students. I mean I that's, that's where I still learn now. I learn how to be more inclusive in the assignments and materials from my students.”.”

Professor Ellis has encouraged the development and facilitation in programming to increase the cultural competency of leadership, faculty, staff, and students, and Professor Ditka has adopted a more color-blind philosophy that he feels should be embraced by the institution, which is:

> “I've been at National Louis for a while, I think the students I've had…whether they've been of color or majority... Here's how I sum up diversity. Everybody counts or nobody counts to me. It's as simple as that.”

Conceptualized Models of Representation

The common themes amongst the two participant groups continue to support the need for diversity, representation, and inclusion in graduate programs. The need for diversity was a frequent topic in the discussions. As these discussions have shown, there is no handbook for

increasing representation, diversity, and inclusion in graduate programs. However, some participants were optimistic that diversification is achievable and that the benefits of creating inclusive campuses extend well beyond our institutional walls into communities and society.

The models were co-constructed collaboratively by the lead researcher and participants. After the collection of data, the researcher shared the results of what was collected in building the conceptual models via email. There are three models. The first shows the students' conceptualization of representation, the second faculty participants' conceptualization of representation, and the third is a model based on the common themes from both student and faculty participants' responses.

Student Model for Representation

Data for this model was collected during focus groups and individual interviews that encouraged the participants to provide an overview of their experiences in their graduate program and how they envision their graduate program. The Student Focus Group/Interview protocol (Appendix D) delved into the students' experience with representation in their current graduate program, followed by questions about how an ideal graduate program that represented their identity would look.

The first question was introduced by laying the groundwork for higher education's stride toward making institutions more equitable and diverse for all students, after which the students expressed their experiences with their representation experience in the curriculum, their peer group, and the program's faculty. The researcher then asked the participants the following questions:

a. With this concept, what has been your experience in representation in your current curriculum and course materials?

b. What is your experience with representation in faculty in your current program?

c. What is your experience with peers in your current program?

The second question was led by an overview of the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory and how it is used to magnify the stories, experiences, narratives, and truths of underrepresented communities. This model for representation has been built based on the following questions:

a. Ideally, how would representation in your current program look?

b. How would representation look in faculty?

c. How would representation look in peers?

d. How would representation look in course materials?

Lastly, the participants were asked how their experience with representation in the classroom/program contributed to their persistence.

Diversity in Faculty

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) "represents an array of conceptualization models of African American racial identity" (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI also "defines racial identity as that part of the person's self-concept that is related to her/his membership within a race" (p. 21). It concerns the individual's significance on race in defining oneself and their interpretation of being African American (p 21). Every student stated they would feel better represented if the faculty were more diversified. Every Black student expressed a sense of belonging and inclusion with Professor Wonder, who was identified as the only African American professor they had encountered in the program. Every student stated that if the program had more African American or Latinx professors, their graduate experience would likely improve by giving them a sense of belonging. Jacob stated, "with my Black professor,

she… there is a different level of connection that I have with her that I did not necessarily have with the other professors… this just like auntie type vibe." The participants described representation of their own identities in the faculty as increasing the likelihood that they can see themselves as having a career in the field. Kiki stated that "I was very introverted, and I did not want to speak until I had Professor (Wonder). I was just more open and felt good about giving my opinions about things than I did before."

Students also discussed the importance of gender representation among faculty members. Although the African American male students felt connected to Professor Wonder, they expressed their need for Black men as professors in the program. Jacob explained how having Black male professors in the program would improve his cognitive skills and performance and his attitude about his intellectual self-confidence toward the college experience. Both males also expressed how the educational field is very saturated with females, which they felt does not provide good representation for the next generation of educators who are coming into the field. Jacob stated,

> "education is dominated by women. We know that, and I think a way in which we can incorporate more Black men like myself into this program is having some form of pipeline at the different colleges at the different universities. Like, hey, this is a way in which we can get back and then having more men be vocal about in the realm of education, be vocal about their experience. It can help start the pipeline for the next generation of Black educators to come."

Students also expressed the importance of having faculty members in the classroom who had worked in diverse, challenging classroom situations to empathize and strategize alongside students. The student participants felt they were being taught how to handle complex, real-world

situations that may occur in adverse settings, but faculty members had not experienced them. When case studies were assigned to them (discussed below under curriculum and coursework), the students felt that a professor who lacked the hands-on experience of working in inner-city schools or in environments where most students were racially minority could not give adequate counsel to graduate students who work or have experience in those circumstances. May explained,

> "most in my course are from the suburbs, and so we don't talk a whole lot about diversity and cultural experiences because don't understand. In fact, we are in our cultural and climate class right now, and a lot of them (faculty members) are the when we it's hard to have that discussion because they're like, well, I don't understand. I grew up in an all White neighborhood. I work in an all White."

Curriculum and Coursework

The participants also expressed that they felt the course materials and coursework did not accurately represent them as practicing professionals in the educational field. They all agreed that more course materials should be written by minority authors who could share their experiences of handling adverse situations. Some participants shared that they worked in inner-city schools with students who faced poverty and violence, often daily, and so personally had hands-on experience with students who had to overcome dysfunction and needed emotional support from their teachers and administrators. These participants felt that having course material from authors with experience in those environments could provide them with practical suggestions, not just theoretical answers.

Participants shared that case studies are used frequently in the curriculum. While a few students felt that case studies should be eliminated because they do not provide accurate

simulations of real-world experiences, other students felt that the case studies should be more realistic to the environment in which they have personal or professional experience. May, an African American student, stated,

> "I have taken it upon myself to read material outside of the classroom from Black authors to get a better understanding of how to handle situations that may occur in the classroom because I do not feel these materials are accurately representing the environments we may be exposed to."

Along the same line, Keith stated,

> "I believe that now, mind you, the professors may not be choosing the books, right. It just may be part of the curriculum, but I think that the personal experiences, specifically, the reason why I brought up (name masked), how the personal experience experiences that she implements into the classroom helps tailor what she wants us to gain from the coursework---It gives us a different perspective. So each student, whether White, Black, Brown, can actually feel OK, this is what I'm supposed to take from this case study. This is how I should approach these situations."

Multiculturalism in Peers

One of the participants, Kiki, felt that her cohort had a good balance of students across racial backgrounds. However, the other student participants did not feel their cohort was diverse. May, who stated that she was one of two Black students in her cohort, stated that the White students make them feel "less than" for being in the program because they were "always dismissing what I or the other Black woman responds to scenarios in the classroom." Other Black students have also said that non-minority students do not collaborate well when they are grouped together. Jacob explained,

> "When we communicate with one another, the minority groups, like when we communicate with one another, like off, you know, offline, we're texting one another. You can, you can. You know, you can feel that bond, that camaraderie there. Whereas with our non-minority cohort members it's like OK you know you get that connection but it's not the same. And we were talking about the subject of equity within the classroom and the communities around. We were doing a case study and I messaged my professor. I said this, this is just an observation. But take a look at how most of our White cohort members were not responding. They were not talking. They were not engaging."

Every participant stated that they would have benefited from having more students from different backgrounds to incorporate their experiences in the educational field.

Faculty Model for Representation

Data used to build this model were collected through focus groups and individual interviews. Participants were encouraged to provide an overview of their experiences as graduate professors and how they would conceptualize the ideal representation of minoritized students' identities in the classroom. Questions from the Faculty Focus Group/Interview protocol (Appendix C) delved into faculty members' perspectives of how students were represented in their program and how the faculty would represent minoritized students' identities in the classroom.

Before asking the first question, the lead researcher laid the groundwork for higher education's stride toward making institutions more equitable and diverse for all students. After outlining the concept of representation in higher education, the lead researcher asked questions that allowed the faculty members to express how they felt their program represented students with minoritized identities in the course curriculum and the faculty, followed by how the faculty

member approaches curriculum that may be adverse to minority students. Lastly, how do they empathize or support students whose identities they do not represent, and how did they provide support to minoritized students. The lead researcher led the second question by giving an overview of the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory and how it is used to magnify the stories, experiences, narratives, and truths of underrepresented groups. The lead researcher then informed the participants that a model for representation would be built based on the following questions: “Ideally, how would you represent minority students in your current program? What would the course materials look like?” Lastly, the third question asked, “How does representation in graduate programs affect graduate students' persistence?” The two common themes mutually inclusive and intersecting were diversity in the faculty and diversity in curriculum and coursework.

Diversity in Faculty

Every faculty participant recognized that there was a very limited number of minority faculty members in this program, which can be a contributory factor in assuring that minority students have proper representation. Previous research has confirmed that faculty diversity is essential to college student completion and significantly affects students' sense of belonging and persistence. Student engagement with diverse faculty could provide different perspectives and build respect for others and empathy. Professor X, who has identified as a White female professor, acknowledges that Black and Latino students are getting college degrees are increasing and recognizes that there is a need for minority representation. She mentioned,

> “I had a student share with me that he felt silenced and oppressed in his group. And we talked, we talked a lot about it, because I, first of all, had no idea this was after the fact.

> And not that I want to, you know, make the student responsible for my choices. But I said, What can I do differently? Like, how would how would that have worked."

Hurtado & Carter (1997) define a sense of belonging in current higher education as individuals' psychological connection to or integration into their community. Every participant acknowledged that the lack of diversity in faculty removes minoritized students' ability to experience belonging to the program. Professor X stated,

> "as far as student belonging, like we are creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive and makes people feel like they are part of the bigger picture. So there's, you know, a whole lot more dynamics about that the hiring (minority faculty) is the first step but it's maintaining sustaining And then creating that culture in that climate that we are not very good at."

Professor Davidson, a White female professor, attempts to give her students a sense of belonging by saying, "a huge part of my understanding around this we talk about it a lot is, is I need to get to know my students, I need to know who they are, I need to learn about them."

Professor Wonder, the only faculty participant with a diverse background, had another perspective on why faculty members representation is important. The issue of tokenism arose due to her being one of the few minority faculty in her program and throughout the National College of Education (NCE) and it was expressed in her saying,

> "That's what it feels like. Like, we need somebody to do the ABC News. Can you do it for us to talk about Juneteenth, we need somebody to talk about what parents can do, can you do that for us so that my face, probably (name masked) will be next will come ends up being the face of National Louis to make it look like that's what we do. And that's not what we do. That's not making me feel included."

In addition, Professor Wonder gives her account of this ethical dilemma by saying,

> "I think the difference between inclusion and diversity is also something that is, should be put on the front. So you can have a whole bunch of Black people, but do we feel like we're included in decisions? Do we feel like our opinions matter to stuff? We can be sitting here and up until George Floyd. I didn't feel I was just sitting there. I was not included. I was not asked anything. But all of a sudden, I was kind of like in Vogue."

Diversity in Curriculum and Coursework

Every faculty participant recognized that this institution has a growing number of minority students entering the program, which encourages a need for more diversity in the curriculum. Furthermore, the absence of faculty members to represent minority students limits the non-minority faculty members' ability to recognize the gaps in the learning materials properly. Professor Ditka, a White male professor, recognized that it took another Black male to address some of the limitations that a diverse curriculum has by not having a minority identify the disparities when he stated,

> "One of the things I really regret is I used to love to teach world history, American history, and I used to love to teach about World War 2 and Oh man, if I would have known back then in 1975 to 80 when I was teaching, if I would have known about the Tuskegee Airmen, you know, I would have taught about them. And I had to get to another school district in Beloit, WI with more Black teachers to know about them. You know? It was only then that I learned about some of The great Black innovators… I could've provided my student... my Black students more insight to their history."

Professor Ditka did recognize that he could never actually know the internal oppressions that minorities may have by not being represented in the curriculum, but he finds ways to provide his

diverse students with representation in the course. He stated that he brings in minority educational professionals who can “fill in the gaps” that are absent in the current coursework.

Professor Davidson, a White female professor, addresses the lack of a diverse curriculum by saying,

> “like we have a bunch of texts, but they won't serve as the main text in most of our classes, because they just they are, they don't cover all the content that we need, if that makes any sense. So we use them as sort of book study books instead. And then we also have been deliberately trying to find articles written by and about people of color. So one of the things that I have found is even if you find like a research article, and like, Black children, and reading foundational reading skills, for example, oftentimes that research has traditionally been done by White people. This limits our ability to provide proper instruction to our students.”

Professor Davidson also mentioned that she recognizes that the curriculum has some microaggressions that are subtle but still recognizable by minority students. She and the other two professors in the focus group said that incorporating diversity includes forming a course with conglomerate course materials, teaching styles, and learning objectives that accommodate diverse students with various learning abilities, cultures, and experiences. Diversity issues are part of the course learning outcomes, and diversity-related topics are ingrained within the course content.

As each participant had a different point of view as to why representation in curriculum adds value to graduate students’ experience, they all mutually agreed that a curriculum cannot provide representation if underrepresented faculty members are not present or included in

curriculum design; hence, diversity in curriculum intersects with diversity in the faculty members because one cannot exist without the other. Professor Davidson stated,

> "And it's only three full-time faculty. And we're all White, White women. …. we have made an effort to find Black and Latin X adjuncts to teach for us. And we have done that. And it makes like I said, I mean, it's people notice it. In a good way, you know, but I definitely think our faculty, our full time faculty is, it's that diverse. It isn't. I do think it's getting better. I mean, a lot better than it was when I first started, but it is. It's not diverse. Not enough to build a diverse curriculum for our students."

Conceptualized Model of Representation for Students and Faculty

Counter-storytelling can be used to attest to the myriad types of systematic inequities that students and faculty members may witness, but they also act as a source of influence and power for enacting change in the environments we are trying to build while expressing better knowledge of the world and its disparities in its current state (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The students and faculty members in a National College of Education (NCE) program who partook in focus groups and interviews voiced their stories. These stories recognized their needs and the demand for representation of minoritized students and faculty in higher education.

Both students and faculty participants agreed that a more diverse campus community exposes students and faculty members to diversified perspectives and aids in introducing them to different ways of thinking. In this model, students and faculty members conceptualize what representation would look like in an ideal graduate program. The results from the students and faculty participants found strong interchange in the diversity of faculty and diversity curriculum and course materials and were found to be mutually inclusive of each other. It is important to

mention that student interviews and focus groups comprised more diversity than faculty participants, which provided limitations that will later be discussed in the delimitations section.

Diversity of Faculty

Faculty representation is not just limited to race and ethnicity but should also include different genders, scholarly interests, professional backgrounds, viewpoints and perspectives, and social statuses. Faculty diversity brings several benefits not only for minority students but also for the institutional campus climate and the faculty themselves.

Improving Students' Sense of Belonging and Engagement

Students' educational experience is enhanced when they are better represented by faculty with diverse backgrounds. For example, minority faculty members can represent minority students as mentors as they may feel more comfortable opening up about their challenges with faculty members with whom they do not share the same background or experiences.

Students and faculty members both agreed that a student's sense of belonging gives students confidence in their scholarly. Minority faculty members provide the necessary support needed for the development of students from their represented groups.

There is also a need for a more diverse selection of mentors and committee members. The students and faculty members both recognized that students should have more faculty selections of similar backgrounds for mentorship and scholarship. Although there is little research surrounding how minority men contributed to the field of higher education, the minority men in this study express a strong need for men who looked like them in their scholarly journey.

Improving Preparation for Real-World Opportunities

The skills students develop in interacting with diverse faculty members and student body whose professional background supports their scholarship also prepare them to interact

successfully in the professional field. Having career professionals in the field who are faculty can give graduate students and faculty members real-world solutions instead of theoretical ones that may not always be applicable. Additionally, most graduate students come into the program having worked in a multicultural world. They will advance in climates where most work settings require interacting with people of different abilities and viewpoints. To succeed in these settings, students must experience the value of other experiences, and faculty members need to know how to communicate in a way sensitive to these differences.

Faculty Representation Reduces Tokenism and Cultural Taxation

Previous research has found that minority professionals in many sectors experience racism through microaggressions, cultural taxation, and tokenism. In this study, the same disparate treatment was expressed by one minority faculty participant. Graduate programs should prioritize eliminating racial disparities in their hiring by having a diversified search committee and opening recruitment processes. Faculty members of color feel tokenized mostly due to the limited amount of diversity to choose from. Minoritized faculty will likely depart the institution if this needs attention. Institutions must incorporate professional development opportunities to retain diverse faculty members. Professional development initiatives for faculty of color can help minority faculty feel supported since most workforce institutions are predominately White.

Course Materials and Curriculum

Incorporating diversity involves creating graduate courses with diverse course materials and inclusive instruction methods that accommodate a varied group of students. It may also mean that diversity issues are included in the learning objectives, and topics related to diversity are incorporated into the course structure. Furthermore, students of all races and backgrounds can benefit from other perspectives, as diverse faculty members help to create curriculums that

are less Eurocentric and representative of the diverse student body at the Minority Serving Institution.

The discovery and critical gaps in the discipline in the researched graduate program were found to be unconsciously exclusionary of diverse experiences and perspectives due to the long history of not having full-time minority faculty members and administrators address the course design. This recognition strongly encourages course audits to remove the lack of representation that can exist for a graduate program that is growing in diversity. This would include but is not limited to lectures, case studies, and course materials. The voices of authors with diverse backgrounds need to be displayed to create a landscape that does not only include one set of instructions or perspectives.

Interrelation of Diverse Faculty and Curriculum

Both students and faculty discussed a strong interrelation between a diversity of faculty and diversity in curriculum design because they believe one cannot exist without the other. With more faculty members of color to help with the design of the curriculum, graduate programs could excel in the movement for better representation and promote acceptance of diversity and equity. Minority faculty members can also recognize and remove any systemic inequities, stereotypes, and tokenism. Non-minority faculty members may not always be aware of the cultural references that may inaccurately misrepresent people of color until they become offensive. If there were more faculty members of color to assist in addressing the diversity of disciplines and course materials before it becomes antagonizing.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Research

Many studies have focused on minority undergraduate enrollment, access, and persistence (Baker & Velez, 1996). However, there is still a need to employ those studies in graduate studies. Postbaccalaureate student enrollment, which includes master's, doctoral, and professional doctoral programs like medical and law school, is expected to increase by "10% over the next 10 years" ("National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education - Postbaccalaureate enrollment para. 1", 2023). In the fall of 2020, 3.1 million advanced graduate students, of which 1.7 million were White, 383,900 were Black, 340,900 were Hispanic, 240,000 were Asian, and 98,000 identified as two or more races ("National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education - Postbaccalaureate enrollment, Fig. 2" 2023). Although the increase in minority enrollment in postgraduate programs has created more racial diversity in advanced degree programs, institutions still have more opportunities to make representation of students and faculty the foci of the graduate experience.

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the current study. First, the current analysis gathers students' and faculty members' experiences with representation in their current graduate program. Second, the research examined how students and faculty conceptualize representation in the classroom of their graduate programs. The responses were used to build both student and faculty conceptualized models of ideal representation. Lastly, models were co-constructed to build a combined model of representation for graduate programs at a Minority Serving Institution (MSI).

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how minoritized graduate students and faculty in their programs perceive representation of student identities in their classrooms. Additionally, the study explored how those same groups would conceptualize the ideal representation of student identities in the classroom. After receiving the responses from the qualitative focus groups and interviews, the researcher and study participants co-constructed models of representation of underrepresented students and faculty identities in a graduate program. The interview protocols allowed the participants to be intimate regarding their respective graduate programs and give their perceptions of how they are represented or how they view representation. Those who participated in focus groups were encouraged to share their experiences with each other and the researcher. The participants who did not participate in the focus groups built a rapport with the researcher, enabling trusted conversations about their experiences.

The use of co-constructed focus groups allowed the participants to share their experiences and converse about their visions for improvement in their current program. For those who could not partake in the focus groups, an individual interview was conducted by using the same protocol and format to allow the participants to share their experiences by asking open-ended exploratory questions. The analysis considered the counter storytelling tenet of Critical Race theory to answer the following research questions:

- How do minority graduate students at a MSI conceptualize the representation of their identity in the classroom?
- How do faculty conceptualize the representation of minoritized students' identities in the classroom?

- How do student and faculty conceptualizations of representation in the classroom align, and where do they diverge?

Two rounds for both students and faculty participants were conducted during the data analysis. The transcripts from all focus groups and interviews were uploaded in Atlas.ti where AI was used to generate codes. The first round of coding found 427 codes for students and 377 for faculty. In the second round, codes were condensed and eliminated, resulting in 35 student codes and 27 for faculty. The final codes were grouped into themes that supported the theoretical framework and the research questions. From further review of the categories and coding, three themes emerged: diversity, representation, and inclusion. These themes and codes were used to build three models of conceptualization: Student Model of Representation, Faculty Model of Representation, and a combined Conceptualized Model of Representation for Students and Faculty.

Research Question: How do minority graduate students at an MSI conceptualize the representation of their identity in the classroom?

The use of counter-storytelling served a very important purpose when speaking to student participants. Employing counter-storytelling allowed students to discuss their academic experiences and elaborate on situations, societal participation, and events in their graduate program. By listening to the counter-stories of minorities, non-minority people can gain access to a viewpoint that may otherwise be denied to them by the implicit biases or discriminatorily undertones that the program may have (Love, 2004).

The participants for this study were all students enrolled in a master's program at the National College of Education (NCE) at National Louis University (NLU). Each student discussed their expectations of how this program would help them progress in their desired areas

of profession. The first section of questions allowed the students to share their perception of representation in their current graduate program through responses to the following questions: What has been your experience in representation in your current curriculum and course materials? What is your experience with representation in faculty in your current program? What is your experience with peers in your current program?

A two-part question was utilized for this study to understand how students viewed representation in their current graduate program and then how the students would conceptualize representation in their ideal graduate program.

The next set of questions helped to answer the research question by asking, “Ideally, how would representation in your current program look? How would representation look in faculty? How would representation look in peers? How would representation look in course materials?” Students conceptualized representation as having diversity in faculty, curriculum, course materials, and in peers. The study's initial hypothesis was that there would be gaps in the representation, and the students would feel cultural dissonance. Based on the findings, the researcher confirmed that the hypothesis was correct.

The student participants felt they were being taught how to handle complex, real-world situations that may occur in adverse settings by faculty who had not experienced those situations. Students mentioned that when case studies were assigned to them, which will be discussed in the curriculum and coursework section, the students felt that a professor who lacked the hands-on experience of working in inner-city school settings that have classrooms with students who had racially minority backgrounds, could not give adequate counsel to graduate students who work or have experience in those circumstances. When May explained, “Most in my courses have faculty who are from the suburbs, and so we don't talk a whole lot about diversity and cultural

experiences because they don't understand." May also gave an example of cultural dissonance as it refers to the peers in the cohort by saying, "In fact, we are in our cultural and climate class right now, and a lot of the faculty and peers find it's hard to have that discussion because they're like, well, I don't understand. I grew up in an all White neighborhood. I work in an all White school district." One student who did not have a diverse background agreed that the lack of representation is a disservice to the program due to being unprepared to face the diverse environments that graduates can possibly work in.

The ideology dimension of racial identity displays personal philosophy about how someone within a racial group should be conducted in society and as a member of that racial group (Hunter et al., 2019). For example, Kiki Black expresses an assimilation ideology that focuses on the importance of behaving in a way that fits in with the rest of the cohort members and faculty. Within the counter-storytelling framework of CRT, student participants' experiences of racial identity involved their racial interactions with members of the same race as well as outside of their racial group, which allowed the researcher to explore themes within Black racial identities further. Students expressed that they had a very good connection with the one Black professor female professor in the program. Jacob referred to this professor, giving him an "auntie vibe" that made him feel relatable and relevant in the classroom. Some students did identify that one other White female professor did give them a sense of belonging by allowing them to voice their concerns.

Culturally diverse students expressed that course materials instructors used for instructing lacked cultural diversity and inclusion, which often made it unrelatable and unable to contribute during discussions in the classroom. Keith stated that the case studies presented a sense of bias as it relates to real-world class experiences. The applications of the learning gained from graduate

programs can be diverse, such as research, cultural networking, employment, and further education. Hence, ensuring diversity in the curriculum and course materials is frequently taxing because it requires diverse, cultural relevance and acceptable educational practices. For this reason, expectations of graduate programs are to address a variety of sources of information that can transfer to sociocultural practices and constructs while expressing implications of the knowledge and skills transfer across all spectrums of the specified program.

The tone of some of the minority students was almost reassuring to them when asked about their ideal representation graduate program. Minority graduate students' history of being excluded from higher education institutions may have caused the dominant group's stereotypical ideology to project on minorities' academic abilities, and their individualistic cultural perspectives demand attention to the contributors needed to effectively represent this group. For example, good representation includes acknowledging culturally sensitive issues that surround minoritized groups.

One of the participants, Kiki, felt that her cohort had a good balance of students across racial backgrounds. However, the other student participants did not feel their cohort was diverse. May, who stated that she was one of two Black students in her cohort, stated that the White students make them feel “less than” for being in the program because they were “always dismissing what I or the other Black woman responds to scenarios in the classroom.” Other Black students have also said that non-minority students do not collaborate well when they are grouped together.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, the competence of faculty plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality and relevance of learning experiences (Guàrdia et al., 2021). However, a persistent challenge faced by institutions is the existence of curriculum gaps. These

gaps manifest as a mismatch between course content and students' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. As a result, student participants discussed how difficult it is to relate to the materials and how inequalities may persist in education. May stated, “I have taken it upon myself to read material outside of the classroom from Black authors to get a better understanding of how to handle situations that may occur in the classroom because I do not feel these materials are accurately representing the environments we may be exposed to." The students also felt that the solution to the problem of curriculum gaps is to propose a comprehensive solution that encompasses needs assessment, curriculum diversification, cultural sensitivity training, ongoing assessment, and professional development for faculty.

Research Question: How do faculty conceptualize the representation of minoritized students’ identities in the classroom?

When interviewing the faculty participants, the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT was also employed; however, the majoritarian storytelling can be the framework that was illuminated. Love (2004) describes majoritarian stories as the “descriptions of events as told by members of majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by majority groups to ensure their dominant position.” Mechanisms used in the development of majoritarian stories conceal White privilege to make it appear as the norm (p. 229). These mechanisms may include devices like adopting the colorblind ideology, making insertions of what is the universal norm, and promoting the narrative that institutions are equitable (p. 229).

The faculty participants in this study consisted of one Black faculty member and the rest being White faculty. The lack of heterogeneity in the participants created a conceptualized representation model that gave the majority group’s ideology of what representation should consist of for minority students; hence why the majoritarian storytelling has an undertone in this

conceptualization. Co-constructed interviews and focus groups coupled with counter-storytelling allowed the Black participant to tell her story and experiences to her colleagues while challenging the stories of colleagues who gave the majoritarian stories.

Before the faculty participants were asked to build an ideal representation graduate program, they were asked to talk about the representation climate of their current graduate program. The questions asked, “Thinking about your current course materials/curriculum, how do you feel minority students are represented? How do you feel they are represented in faculty? How do you approach a curriculum that may be averse to minority students? How do you empathize with or support students who’s identities you do not represent? “ When Professor Davidson was asked how she felt minoritized students are represented in faculty, curriculum, and course materials in the graduate program, she stated: “Representation….It makes a big difference to students. That's one thing we learned is, you know, you can bring in these articles, and you can bring in these books, but how about you bring in some faculty that look like us? Or my program is, it's just three people. And it's all three full time faculty. And we're all White, White women. So, as (Professor X) said, we have made an effort to find Black and Latinx adjuncts to teach for us. And we have done that...I mean, it's, people who notice it. In a good way, you know, but I think our faculty, our full-time faculty, is diverse.” However, when asking the Black faculty participant, known as Professor Wonder, the response was, “ And I like when you said representation, you made me think about, like, as I walked the halls, at our buildings that we don’t have…I don't see minority representation. Most recently, I was able to get some students who are from this belonging project that we were working on with one of the districts where someone who's a graduate is now working, and so I have some of the student’s artwork…but I don't think we (African Americans) are represented in the texts or in what you see in the

environment.” This is one of the examples of how people may see eye to eye on the importance of equity, many diversity initiatives are overlooking the crucial components that is essential for promoting representation. While non-minority faculty viewed representation as having more diversity, the minority faculty member could define what representation meant for African Americans in the institution.

While diversity is about bringing together people from all walks of life, representation ensures that these diverse faculty and their viewpoints can be found or depicted across all departments and seniority levels within the institution. Professor Wonder also mentioned experiencing tokenism and the feeling of exclusion when saying, “that's what it feels like. Like, we need somebody to do the ABC News. Can you do it for us to talk about Juneteenth; “we need somebody to talk about what parents can do, can you do that for us.” So that my face, probably (name masked) will be next, will come and end up being the face of National Louis to make it look like that's what we do and that's not what we do. That's not making me feel included. I think the difference between inclusion and diversity is also something that should be put on the front. So you can have a whole bunch of Black people, but do we feel like we're included in decisions? Do we feel like our opinions matter to stuff? We can be sitting here and up until George Floyd. I didn't feel I was just sitting there. I was not included. I was not asked anything. But all of a sudden, I was kind of like in Vogue.”

Diversification of faculty also helps with the racial battle fatigue that faculty of color experience. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) is described as “the physical and psychological toll taken due to constant and unceasing discrimination, microaggressions, and stereotype threats” (Smith et al., 2011). As Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as the theoretical framework of RBF, the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT governs the underlines of RBF research (Martin, 2018).

Research such as this study that employs counter-storytelling further exposes microaggressions and RBF and how they impact faculty of color (Smith et al., 2006).

Professor Wonder did feel like the other faculty were "doing the best they can and presenting their best self," although their best may not equate to equitable diversity or representation. If there are no other minority voices to give their counter-stories, then the conversation to open up and expose microaggressions and other disparate treatments could become disabled. The differences in perspectives also could raise the question of whether representation could be attained at an MSI if there are not many minority voices to tell what representation really means.

Before asking the second set of questions, the participants were informed that a model for representation would be built based on their conceptualization of the following questions: "Ideally, how would you represent minority students in your current program? What would the course materials look like?" Lastly, the third question asked, "How does representation in graduate programs affect graduate students' persistence?" The two common themes that were mutually inclusive and intersecting were diversity in faculty and diversity in curriculum and coursework.

The faculty participants' responses align with most research findings on why minority representation correlates to student success and achievement. Looking beyond equality in representation from an institutional policy standpoint, which could act as a barrier to better quality in minoritized representation, the participants affirmed that the institution must make better efforts to recognize the lack of faculty diversity, and how it reflects on the diverse student body. Professor Ellis stated: "So myself and (name masked), who is a White male close to retirement age, and me being a White female, we're not representing as well as I mean, yes, we,

you know, we do need more people teaching in the program." She also recognized that the relationship between graduate students and their chairperson and committee members is linked to students' successful completion of their capstone and program of study. Professor Ellis goes on to say: "A drawback for our main courses, however, especially at the doctoral level, our students have committees… We start working with their doctoral chair and committee member in their second term of the three-year program. So, we have them develop people to choose their own committee members based on subject matter and find an expert who has subject matter experts and/or other connections that they have… from underrepresented races…they're being really vocal about what they want. To have that representation and for them to have that on their committees because we don't have it as much."

When speaking about inclusion, Professor Ditka has adopted a more color-blind philosophy that he feels should be embraced by the institution, which is:

> "I've been at National Louis for a while, I think the students I've had…whether they've been of color or majority... Here's how I sum up diversity. Everybody counts or nobody counts to me. It's as simple as that."

Although Professor Ditka has a philosophy that appears to be an inclusive approach to addressing the lack of inclusion, the color-blind effect has been shown to cause more division and exclusion than inclusion. While there is an acknowledgment that diversification is needed on campus to assist in creating safe spaces and support networks, there should also be recognition of the need for intentional methods for interaction across all minority racial groups and for increased institutional sensitivity which unfortunately, having color blind ideology does not acknowledge (Jackson et al., 2014).

Research Question: How do student and faculty conceptualizations of representation in the classroom align, and where do they diverge?

Both participant groups were asked the same questions regarding building the conceptualization model of an ideal graduate program. When the interviews were concluded, each group co-constructed to assist with building both the student and faculty models. Both students and faculty participants agreed that a diverse institution community allows students to be exposed to a variety of perspectives, helps them to be better problem solvers, and introduces a different way to think. In this model, students and faculty conceptualize what representation would look like in an ideal graduate program. The results from the students and faculty participants found strong intersectionality in the diversity of faculty and diversity curriculum and course materials and were found to be mutually inclusive of each other.

Students and faculty both agreed that when a student has a sense of belonging, there is improvement in academic outcomes, students' confidence in their curriculum increases, and increased continuing enrollment in academia. Minority faculty provides support and opportunities for growth and development to students from respective represented groups.

There is also a need for a more diverse selection of mentors and committee members. The students and faculty both recognized that students should have more faculty selections of similar backgrounds for mentorship and scholarship. Although there is little research surrounding how minority men contributed to the field of higher education, the minority men in this study express a strong need for men who looked like them in their scholarly journey.

Both students and faculty discussed strong intersectionality with a diversity of faculty and diversity in curriculum design because they believe one cannot exist without the other. With more faculty of color to help with the design of the curriculum, graduate programs could excel in

the movement for better representation and promote acceptance of diversity and equity. Minority faculty can also recognize and remove any systemic inequities, stereotypes, and tokenism.

The divergence of conceptualization came from the point of view and the demographic of each participant group. The Black men in student groups expressed how the lack of Black men in higher education professional positions has negative implications for the male students of color experiencing marginalization in course materials and curriculum and isolation from campus communities. The Black females in the student groups expressed how the lack of Black faculty and peers made them feel inferior and imposed feelings of impostor syndrome and racism. Although previous research has shown that students' sense of belonging in college is significantly associated with their persistence and completion, graduate students in this research expressed that they were determined to complete the program but desired to have a better experience that can be transferred to real-world experiences. This reality underscores the urgency for higher education educators to understand how to adopt a sense of belonging in their classrooms.

Some of the non-minority faculty members had a colorblind solution to the lack of representation in their program. Color-blind ideologies often arise from "the belief that openly claiming to see skin color or race as a significant factor deems someone as racist" (Diggles, 2014). The mission of graduate programs is to equip future professionals with the knowledge needed to succeed in a growing, diverse workforce (Wendler et al., 2012); therefore, MSIs should make purposeful efforts to teach students how to address issues related to race and racism should be a priority. Although it is promising to believe that racism is no longer a critical issue, however, race and racism are still issues with many innuendos for many areas in minority students and faculty at MSI.

Significance of Study

The creation of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) responded to the historical inequity that denied minorities access to majority institutions (Schmidt, 2022). MSIs have significance in the economic changes that are taking place, “especially concerning the disproportionate workforce outlooks of disadvantaged populations and minimizing the underrepresentation of minorities and underprivileged people in graduate programs and for the job opportunities that require Master's degree education and development” (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

Currently, there are several studies that look at representation at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and undergraduate retention and persistence at MSIs. This study fills the gap by examining graduate student and faculty experiences at an MSI, especially a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), and used those experiences with representation to build a model for ideal representation in their graduate program. The findings found that better representation is linked to a sense of belonging for students and faculty in the graduate program, including positive acceptance and respect from important groups and peers. Studies have found that a lack of representation results in a sense of alienation. Implementation of representation models that derive from qualitative analysis of the experiences of the students and faculty could reduce faculty dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and imposter syndrome, which in turn impacts retention and satisfaction. The findings in this study could be instrumental in adding to better student and faculty experiences in graduate programs at MSIs, which will be outlined in the Implications for Practice section.

Implications for Practice

The current president of the United States has “secured historic investments in institutions that enroll and graduate disproportionate shares of low-income students and students

of color, including tens of billions of dollars in funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) through the Department of Education," ("FACT SHEET: President Biden announces actions to promote educational opportunity and diversity in colleges and universities, paras 12-13" n.d.). Since the start of the research, policymakers have made new court rulings that have affected higher education policies that use racial preferences to recruit Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students and faculty. In this last year alone, race-based admissions were eliminated by the U.S. Supreme Court, and several states have removed and banned diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) related programs and practices in higher education (Shkliarevsky, 2023). However, Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) have not been dissolved and still have the autonomy to make DEI in graduate programs their priority by implementing active practices to address the representation gaps by taking a continual collection of data to assess graduate students and faculty experiences, hiring and retaining faculty with diverse backgrounds, and redesigning current curriculum.

The implications for practice that stem from the findings of this study will be discussed in this section. The suggestions for practice include:

- Continual data collection to assess graduate students' and faculty experiences.
- Intentional hiring and retention of minority faculty.
- Redesigning course curricula and materials.

Institutional Research Department Continual Collection of Data to Assess Graduate Students and Faculty Experiences

The findings from this study discovered that the students and the one minority faculty did not feel that their need for representation was a concern for the program. The one minority

faculty member stated how the institution did not have the inclusivity of minority members. The findings also revealed that there was a lack of effort to collect data on student and faculty experiences in the program. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at MSI campuses are meant to foster an inclusive campus where all students can succeed. For that to happen, MSIs will need to focus on creating institutional systems that collect and analyze data that informs campus decision-making and creating such as implementing effective student and faculty success policies. The funds that will be allocated for MSIs could be invested to ensure that the proper data is continually collected to ensure that the experiences of minoritized students and faculty are aligned with the MSI's mission.

Institutional research and assessment offices will be necessary for institutions committed to data-informed change. Institutional research departments will need the proper system technology and staff resources to collect and assess institutional data and inform leadership to translate this data into information that can better inform program practices and policies regarding the representation gaps and their effects on minority students and faculty. Data collection can help institutions successfully create a culture of accountability.

Hiring and Retention of Minority Faculty

According to the U.S. Department of Interior, "the MSI Program taps into the talents of students and faculty attending our nation's MSIs with the hopes of fulfilling the Department's mission and objectives" ("Minority serving institutions program," 2021). The minority faculty researched in this graduate program lacked representation of faculty, which contributed to their sense of belonging. Institutions should monitor progress regularly by analyzing and interpreting the data that relates to the retention, recruitment and belonging of minority faculty. Turnover needs to be understood to ensure all efforts to hire and identify talent will be well spent.

Successful faculty diversification relies heavily on diversity being embedded in the institution's mission and value. While the recent legal rulings may hinder the way higher education campuses hire and retain faculty members, institutions can still widen their hiring pool to ensure that candidates with diverse backgrounds are included in the decision-making.

Since the elimination of affirmative action strategies for hiring across all racial/ethnic groups can no longer be violated, it will allow institutions to create new strategic hiring methods. Additionally, focusing on faculty success will rely on support, mentorship, and space for a sabbatical to do research. In this study, the qualitative data suggested that special hiring practices should be made with the intentional support of the department and with high regard for the scholarly contribution of the person hired.

National Louis University (NLU) has a doctoral program through the National College of Education (NCE) that provides advanced training to practitioners, principals, superintendents, researchers, and policymakers (National Louis University, n.d.). NLU could make strategic efforts to recruit and develop future faculty members to be part of the strategy, too. Many of the minority student participants expressed an interest in continuing to the doctorate program at NLU. National Louis University serves a “predominantly working adult, non-traditional student population comprised of a large percentage of minorities in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs in education” (National Louis University, n.d.). NLU has an average persistence rate for doctoral programs of 90% and a 47% graduate over three years (National Louis University, n.d.). Recruiting these students could also add to diversifying faculty.

Faculty Development to Support Minoritized Students

Because Minority Serving Institutions are charged with providing minority students with an inclusive campus environment, it is important that the professional development for faculty

who do not have minority backgrounds be intentional. Some recommendations for development include encouraging faculty to ask for feedback from students. Listening to students talk about their experiences and the support that would increase their belonging could help faculty incorporate ideas into their learning curriculum in the following cohorts or semesters.

It is also important to express the importance of not avoiding difficult topics and creating opportunities for open conversation. By doing so, students may feel more open to discussing any microaggressions, stereotype threats, impostor syndrome, and many more difficult subjects that they may have experienced. Actively listening to that discussion can help to expose the faculty to their issues and experiences. The creation and maintenance of a safe and respectful space model active listening and learning be it one-on-one and within group settings.

Lastly, it is important that non-minority faculty be willing to call out the elephant in the room when approaching a curriculum that may be averse to minority students. When teaching underrepresented students, it is important that the faculty be open about their position and identity, aware of privilege, and how to navigate it. Although vulnerability cannot be taught, faculty can be taught how to remove their own point of view from the minority students who may have experienced structural inequality and institutionalized racism.

Redesigning Course Curriculum and Materials

Curriculum redesign should be implemented to establish a curriculum that promotes and improves the quality of student learning. The redesigning process should include suggestions based on the research done during faculty sabbatical and evaluated by an audience that supports a diverse curriculum.

To address the equity gaps of representation that the students and faculty framed in this study, institutional leadership should examine to what degree minority students discern the

course materials and curriculum as culturally relative. To be successful with this implementation, a culturally sensitive evaluation should be developed that draws from the underpinnings of Critical Race Theory.

Inviting guest speakers who better represent minority students into the classroom is a classic teaching strategy that some of the participants in this study have implemented into their curriculum. Welcoming other voices into the curriculum could provide students with access to other perspectives, add variety to the classroom routine, and demonstrate that learning is a collaborative enterprise. Using multicultural materials, experiences, and perspectives in post-graduate curricula could regulate pluralism. Fundamentals to designing a curriculum that employs a diversity of means and materials to teach common learning outcomes to diverse learners in knowing what constitutes the bottom line of graduate education, multicultural education, and cultural development.

Recommendations for Research

This qualitative research explored and provided a deep insight into faculty and students' experiences with representation within a graduate program. While conducting this study, numerous areas for continual and new research emerged. Because qualitative research is designed to generate hypotheses as well as further analyze and understand data, a more concrete discovery could have been reached if there were more student and faculty participants to gather more experiences and perceptions. Due to the minority demographic of students being Black and there being only one faculty participant, the perceptions of other minoritized identities such as Latino/a, Asian, or Pacific Islander were not considered in this research. The study could have also provided more significance if there were more minority faculty to add to the conceptualization of representation and to analyze if there were shared experiences among

individuals with minority identities. The limited number of minority faculty in this program highlights the importance of the purpose of this study. To properly represent students with minoritized identities, the number of minority faculty should be reflective of the student body. Also, this study was conducted at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and could have benefited from Hispanic student and faculty participants who could support or dismiss the premises that HSIs adequately support and are beneficial to Hispanic students. This study had no participants who identified as Latino/a. The goal of this study was to have more heterogeneity in race, ethnicity, and gender in faculty and student participants, but the willing participant pool did not yield that desired diversity.

Future studies could look at several other graduate programs at National Louis University and other MSIs and analyze if the findings were similar or different. For programs with similar or different conceptualizations, the researcher could look at the diversification of the students and faculty and the overall program climate to determine what led to the findings. The findings could give MSIs an overview of the campus climates, programmatic representation of both students and faculty, and how it affects their sense of belonging while also strengthening the data collected by the institutional research and assessment offices.

Creating an action research project around this topic would also benefit a broader understanding of representation. For example, students could be interviewed or invited to focus groups after each class in a program to discuss experiences in representation specific to that course. As with this study, the research could allow the students to answer open-ended questions that could encourage the discovery of students' experiences within that class as well as their program more broadly. This action research could be more of a real-time study that would yield results applicable to the next cohort in the respective graduate program. A collection of data

during the student and faculty process could make an active difference in correcting the nuances that may occur. In addition, real-time action research will actively aim to address problematic situations in contexts including classroom experiences, personnel interactions, and peer reviews and is conducted to explore relevant theory and practice through data collection and analysis. An examination of participants' perspectives could inform changes in practice and policy that directly benefit students in both the short and long term cohorts, ensuring that the research process directly benefits those involved.

Conclusion

According to Schmidt, 2022, “Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) occupy a unique space within the umbrella of higher education; they are federally recognized institutions that serve students of color.” The purpose of this study was to explore how students with minoritized identities conceptualized representation in their graduate program at an MSI and how faculty conceptualized the representation of minoritized students’ identities in the classroom. The conceptualizations from both student and faculty participants were co-constructed to build models for ideal representation in a graduate program for both students and faculty, followed by a combined conceptualized model. The findings that emerged from this research were that minoritized student participants and one minority faculty participant did not feel represented in their graduate program. The underrepresentation resulted in a lack of sense of belonging and imposter syndrome for the students and the minority faculty members with diverse backgrounds. The non-minority faculty participants and the one non-minority student participant acknowledged that the minorized representation was limited or non-existent but did feel that National Louis was making attempts to diversify the faculty to support the students better.

Both students and faculty discussed strong intersectionality with a diversity of faculty and diversity in curriculum design because they believe one cannot exist without the other. With more faculty of color to help with the design of the curriculum, graduate programs could excel in the movement for better representation and promote acceptance of diversity and equity. Minority faculty can also recognize and remove any systemic inequities, stereotypes, and tokenism. The non-minority faculty may not always be aware of the cultural references that may inaccurately misrepresent people of color until they become offensive if there were more faculty of color to assist in addressing the diversity of disciplines and course materials before it becomes antagonizing.

Further exploration of the relationship between graduate faculty and student representation may help MSIs identify long-term strategies that support students with minoritized identity success and increase the number of faculty with diverse backgrounds to support better and represent those students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Faculty Screening Questionnaire

What is your name and best email address for follow-up selection?

What Graduate Program are you currently instructing?

Demographic Questions (to ensure diversity in the study)

1. What is your ethnicity:

   Hispanic or Latino/a or

   Non-Hispanic or Latino/a
2. What is your race(s):

   Hispanic or Latino

   Asian

   Black or African American or of African descent

   American Indian or Alaska Native

   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

   White
3. What is your gender/gender Identity?

Please email the completed form to [redacted] promptly. If you are selected to be part of the focus group, you will be emailed with the Zoom link and agreed upon time.

Appendix B: Student Screening Questionnaire

What is your name and best email address for follow-up selection?

What Graduate Program are you currently enrolled in?

Demographic Questions (to ensure diversity in the study)

1. What is your ethnicity:

   Hispanic or Latino/a or

   Non-Hispanic or Latino/a
2. What is your race(s):

   Hispanic or Latino

   Asian

   Black or African American or of African descent

   American Indian or Alaska Native

   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

   White
3. What is your gender/gender Identity?
4. Are you a first-generation college student?

Please email the completed form to [redacted] promptly. If you are selected to be part of the focus group, you will be emailed with the Zoom link and agreed upon time.

Appendix C: Faculty Focus Group/Interview Questions

1. Universities are often regarded as a site for embracing multiculturalism and diversity; however, historically, this has often conflicted with an enduring legacy of racial inequality. As a site for social diversity, equity, and inclusion, universities are responsible for incorporating diversity into their organizational structures and cultures. The reason for this is so that minority students have equal cultural imagery or representation as non-minority students.
    a. Thinking about your current course materials/curriculum, how do you feel minority students are represented?
    b. How do you feel they are represented in faculty?
    c. How do you approach a curriculum that may be averse to minority students?
    d. How do you empathize with or support students who's identities you do not represent?
2. Critical race theory (CRT) has provided a powerful framework for articulating the needs and demands for educational equity in U.S. education and has demonstrated great success in shifting the terms of the debate over the increasingly diverse student population from a community deficit model to one of community strengths. Based on the long and difficult struggle for educational equity, we need to understand further how counter-storytelling can be used as a research method to build new models for representation. With your help, I would like to build a model for minority representation in graduate programs.
    a. Ideally, how would you represent minority students in your current program?
    b. What would the course materials look like?
3. How does representation in graduate programs affect graduate student persistence?

Appendix D: Student Focus Group/Interview Questions

1. Universities are often regarded as a site for embracing multiculturalism and diversity; however, historically, this has often conflicted with an enduring legacy of racial inequality. As a site for social diversity, equity, and inclusion, universities are responsible for incorporating diversity into their organizational structures and cultures. The reason for this is so that minority students have equal cultural imagery or representation as non-minority students.
    d. With this concept, what has been your experience in representation in your current curriculum and course materials?
    e. What is your experience with representation in faculty in your current program?
    f. What is your experience with peers in your current program?

2 Critical race theory (CRT) has provided a powerful framework for articulating the needs and demands for educational equity in U.S. education and has demonstrated great success in shifting the terms of the debate over the increasingly diverse student population from a community deficit model to one of community strengths. Based on the long and difficult struggle for educational equity, we need to understand further how counter-storytelling can be used as a research method to build new models for representation. With your help, I would like to build a model for minority representation in graduate programs.
    a. Ideally, how would representation in your current program look?
    b. How would representation look in faculty?
    c. How would representation look in peers?
    d. How would representation look in course materials?

3 How has your experience with representation in the classroom/program contributed to your persistence?