

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
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Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership  
and Retention

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2011

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Chair

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2011

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my soul mate, Arlene, and Bella bunny for their unconditional love and unwavering support in our family quest to finish.

This is also dedicated to my parents, George and May, for instilling the value of education into the fabric of my being.

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Arlene, we did it! Get ready for life without a doctoral program. What movie do you want to watch?

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership and Retention

by

Gregory J. Toya

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2011

California State University, San Marcos, 2011

Professor Lorri Santamaría, Chair

Changing demographics and the widening educational achievement gap called for this examination of underserved university student retention (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Miller & Garcia, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2006). University cultural centers promote retention and sense of belonging for underserved students (June, 1996; Patton,

2006; Welch, 2008). This study included Schlossberg's (1989) theory of mattering to investigate underserved student retention. Using constructivist grounded theory data analysis methods, this study examined the influences of sense of belonging and mattering on underserved student retention in a university cultural center (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative data collection methods were implemented to analyze cultural center and cultural center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students. Seven undergraduate students and one full-time staff member in the Cross-Cultural Center at California State University, San Marcos, participated in focus groups and an interview. Document analysis contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A theory grounded in the experiences of the students, student staff, and staff of the Cross-Cultural Center emerged from the data. The emerging theory was called "Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership and Retention." Distributed relational leadership was the core or central phenomenon of the grounded theory. As a rich emergent finding, identity development was added to this study's conceptual framework of sense of belonging, mattering, and retention. Distributed relational leadership, sense of community, the physical space of the Center, and programs influenced the sense of belonging, mattering, identity development, and retention of underserved students. This study's grounded theory guides ongoing retention theory research and university cultural center practices.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Rapid demographic changes in the United States call for increased services and support for underserved university students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Princes, 1994). Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans will increase from one-quarter to one-third of the nation's population by 2030 (Jones et al.; Princes). According to Jones and associates, the "browning of America" will continue to ethnically diversify the school-aged population because of rising immigration rates (p. 19). The ethnic diversification of university students heightens the necessity to address the educational achievement gap of underserved students.

### Statement of the Problem

The educational achievement gap for a rising underserved collegiate population is the disparity of student outcomes between White and Asian students with Black, Latinos, Native/Indigenous, Southeast Asian, and their Pacific Islander peers (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Valencia (2002) further defined the disparity of student outcomes as the "persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate low rates of student test scores, retention, and college-enrollment" (p. 4). In 2000, Swail (2003) found that 43% of Latinos, 21% of African Americans, 14% of Asians, and 11% of Whites failed to finish high school. Of the students who do graduate from high school, many are not college ready (Swail; Miller & Garcia, 2004). For example, according to Miller and Garcia, Latino students complete less college preparatory courses, finish high school with lower GPAs, and score lower in

Advancement Placement tests than White and Asian American students. These dismal high school statistics for underserved students do not bode well for college entrance or success. Swail indicated that the six-year graduation rate of students enrolling in four-year institutions for the 1995-96 academic year were as follows: 46% African American, 47% Latino, 67% White, and 72% Asian, confirming that the achievement gap continues. The disparity of student outcomes for an increasing underserved undergraduate population calls for effective programs to narrow the educational achievement gap.

Several scholars (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994) have shown university cultural centers can contribute to narrowing the educational achievement gap by serving as a source of retention, persistence, sense of belonging, and *home away from home* for underserved students. Jones and associates and Patton assert that cultural centers serve as a *safe space* to advocate for the needs of underserved students. Safe space was reflected in the home-away-from-home environment provided by cultural centers. The home-away-from-home environment was a place where students could be themselves, spend time with friends, fulfill various academic and co-curricular needs, relax, escape, and feel safe (Jones et al.; June, 1996; Patton).

Several prominent researchers in the field of cultural centers in higher education settings have found these centers to reduce the sense of isolation, alienation, and lack of belonging for underserved students (June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). The safe spaces of cultural centers tend to promote retention and sense of belonging of underserved students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June; Princes, 1994; Welch). Patton acknowledged the safe-space function of the cultural center for students to cope with racism, separatism, and apathy. Princes noted that Black cultural

centers were established to ameliorate the retention problem for students of African descent. Similarly, June found cultural centers promote persistence through cultural bonding and sense of community. Welch reported that student interaction and center resources increase sense of belonging. Together this research corroborates the notion that cultural centers greatly enhance the educational experience of underserved students in university settings.

However, the influence of cultural centers on underserved student retention, sense of belonging, and mattering warrants further examination. Scholars have found that cultural center staff members exhibited professionalism, genuine care, compassion, and welcoming personas (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). Center staff created a home-away-from-home atmosphere that assisted in coping with a hostile campus climate (Patton; Turner). Although significant literature exists regarding faculty impact on student retention (Bean, 1983; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996), there is a gap of empirical research regarding staff influence on underserved student retention and sense of belonging.

### Rationale for the Study

These findings call for further empirical analysis of the retention and sense-of-belonging influence of cultural center staff on underserved students. There is a need to expand Welch's (2008) findings regarding cultural centers' impact on sense of belonging. Exploration of mattering on underserved students could also explain the retention function of cultural centers. Currently, there are no empirical data regarding cultural



center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989). Examination of cultural center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering with underserved students using cultural centers may further inform the retention function of cultural centers. Increased understanding of cultural center retention functions may assist educators with closing the educational achievement gap for underserved students in higher education settings.

Historical antecedents and the contemporary safe-space and home-away-from-home functions of cultural centers promote retention of underserved students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Hefner, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Princes, 1994). These scholars called for increased empirical analyses regarding the retention function of cultural centers on underserved students. The need for further analyses serves as the impetus for this proposed study (Bengiveno, 2001; Jones et al.; Kasper, 2004; Patton, 2006).

This inquiry explored how college and university cultural centers influence retention of underserved students. Cultural centers were founded in the 1960s as a mechanism to increase the retention rate of students of African American and African descent at predominately White institutions (Patton, 2006; Princes, 1994). The retention function of cultural centers expanded to all students of color (Latin, Asian and Pacific Island, Native American descent, etc.) and underserved students (students from low socioeconomic households) as the population diversified in the 1980s (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002). Cultural centers also promote success of underserved students through multicultural programming and contributions to a welcoming campus climate (Jones et al., 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

## Conceptual Framework

### *Retention*

Spady (1970, 1971) presented a sociological model that based dropouts on the interaction between student characteristics and the campus environment. Tinto expanded on Spady's pioneering model of student dropouts (1970, 1971). Tinto's (1975, 1993) theoretical proposal, *A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure*, explained the impact of academic and social integration on retention. Empirical studies (June, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) affirmed and challenged the applicability of Tinto (1975, 1993) to underserved students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Tinto (1993) included faculty and staff interaction in the model as a component of the student's academic system within the institutional experience. Research on the impact of faculty and staff interaction for students included benefits to retention (Braxton et al., 2000; Chhuon & Hudley; Nora et al., 1996) and sense of belonging (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

### *Sense of Belonging*

Sense of belonging was operationalized from Tinto's (1993) interaction of academic and social integration concepts (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002). An increased sense of belonging for students of color positively impacts academic and social integration for students of color at predominately White institutions (Hausmann et al.; Hoffman et al.; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto) and at Hispanic-serving institutions (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007).

### *Mattering*

Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) and Schlossberg's (1989) mattering construct has been applied to college student retention. Rosenberg and McCullough define mattering as "a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension" (p. 165). Schlossberg described the five tenants of mattering for college students as attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation. Research on mattering examined the transition of first-year students (Fetty, 2005; Rayle & Chung, 2007) and underserved students' perceptions of the college environment (Cuyjet, 1998; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1996; Phillips, 2005).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine cultural center influence on feelings of mattering and a sense of belonging for underserved college students. Specifically, this study explored cultural center staff influence on mattering and sense of belonging for underserved students. This study addressed the need for further understanding of underserved student retention through the generation of a proposed cultural center retention theory. The setting for this study was at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM).

### Research Questions

A constructivist grounded theory research design was used to analyze the study's research questions (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). The research questions were as follows:

1. In what ways does a cross-cultural center influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
2. In what ways does a cross-cultural center staff influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
3. How do underserved students relate to mattering and sense of belonging constructs? Are there other constructs that may explain underserved student retention?

#### Overview of the Methods

This study implemented qualitative data analysis methods to examine the study's research questions. Qualitative methods explain the experiences of college students, especially when limited data exists on the study's phenomenon (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). The dearth of cultural center literature and the need to understand the retention role of cultural centers called for a qualitative methodological approach (Creswell, 2008).

The phenomenon of analyzing mattering and sense of belonging in the context of a university cross-cultural center called for grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory analysis may also produce theoretical explanations to the experiences of underserved students in university cultural centers (Creswell, 2008; Grbich, 2007). Thus,

the need to develop theory generated from student experiences with cross-cultural centers justifies the grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Constructivist grounded theory analysis procedures were implemented for this study. Constructivist grounded theory analysis was used to understand the social justice phenomenon of underserved student retention (Charmaz, 2005). Constructivist grounded theory offered flexible methodological options to examine cross-cultural center and center staff influence on underserved student retention (Charmaz, 2006; Edwards & Jones, 2009). The primary data sources for this constructivist grounded theory analysis were focus groups and an interview (Creswell, 2008). Document analysis was utilized to frame the focus group and interview data and to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Significance of the Study

In a time of tight budgets, one of the areas often threatened with cuts in universities is student services. Yet narrowing the achievement gap through increased retention for underserved students is absolutely critical. Understanding how cross-cultural centers may play a role in retention informs legislators and university administrators regarding the value of cultural centers on university campuses. Increasing knowledge of how the establishment of cultural centers creates a safe space and home-away-from-home environment for underserved students could ensure increased educational equity and access. This examination of cultural center staff and underserved student sense of belonging and mattering informs future research and practice. Too few studies that are narrow in scope and unpublished doctoral dissertations currently inform our knowledge

of cultural centers (Ago, 2002; Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Longerbeam, Sedlacek, Balón, & Alimo, 2003; Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). Through a qualitative method design, this study helps to fill the knowledge gap and add to the limited literature on university cultural centers (Jones et al.; Patton; Welch). Moreover, this analysis informs scholars and practitioners regarding the application of sense of belonging, mattering, and other retention-related theories to underserved students.

### Definition of Terms

**Cultural Center**—Longerbeam and colleagues (2003) offered a definition of cultural centers through the parallel term, *multicultural program organizations* (MPOs). Jackson and Hardiman (as cited in Longerbeam et al.) defined MPOs as “units on campus that have as their primary responsibility to engage differing constituencies of the campus community in services and educational interventions that, broadly defined, work to overcome systems of social oppression” (p. 89).

**Mattering**—Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) defined mattering as “a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension” (p. 165).

**Retention**—Berger and Lyon (2005) defined retention as “the ability of a particular college or university to graduate the students that initially enroll in the institution” (p. 3).

**Sense of Belonging**—Hausmann and colleagues (2007) defined sense of belonging as “the psychological sense that one is a valued member of the community” (p. 804).

Underserved Student—Bragg, Kim, and Rubin (2005) defined underserved students as “financially disadvantaged, racial/minorities, and first-generation individuals who are not represented in colleges and universities in proportion to their representation in the K-12 educational system or in society at large” (p. 6).

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a thorough literature review of college and university cultural centers. Research regarding cultural center definitions, history, purpose, function, and types of centers will be discussed. Chapter 2 also presents further empirical review of the study’s conceptual framework with retention, sense of belonging, and mattering. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodological approach. Further information regarding epistemologies, participants, setting, data gathering, and analysis are discussed. Chapter 4 details the results of the constructivist grounded theory analysis. Chapter 5 describes the significance and meaning of the results. Practical implications for higher education leaders, recommendations for future research, and the study’s limitations are also presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature regarding college and university cultural centers. The literature synthesis of cultural centers commences with definitions and a historical annotation of cross-cultural centers, lesbian gay bisexual transgender (LGBT) centers, and women's centers. Due to the scarcity of cultural center literature, women's and LGBT centers and mono/Black/ethnic-specific and multicultural centers are included; however, this study focuses on cross-cultural centers at four-year universities. This chapter analyzes the cultural center literature regarding purpose and function (Ago, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Princes, 1994); location, size, and operational issues (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al.; Patton, 2006); and the advantages and disadvantages of mono-ethnic-specific versus multi/cross-cultural centers (Ago; Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Patton; Princes).

The literature review continues with theories that form the conceptual framework for this inquiry. This study reviews scholarly work on the constructs: retention (Tinto, 1993), sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989).

### Cultural Centers

#### *Background*

Student activism, growing numbers of underserved college students, and political dynamics are common antecedents to the creation of university cultural centers (Ago, 2002; Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June 1996; Patton, 2006).



Hillel and Newman Centers—cultural centers for Jewish and Catholic students, respectively—were established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart). The formation of cultural centers to address needs of students of color arose during the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Hefner, 2002; Patton; Princes, 1994). Higher education desegregation policy amendments and rising numbers of African American students attending predominately White institutions (PWIs) led to the establishment of Black cultural centers (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Jones et al.; Patton; Princes). African American student activists spearheaded the movement to establish Black cultural centers on PWIs (Patton; Princes). PWIs charged Black cultural centers with the mission of improving the graduation and retention rates of the rising population of African American students and students of African descent (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Princes).

Multicultural/cross-cultural centers proliferated on PWIs across the country in the 1980s and 1990s (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Princes, 1994). Before 1980, relatively few multicultural/cross-cultural centers existed on university campuses. However, the rapid increase and diversification in the students-of-color population served as the impetus for growth of multicultural/cross-cultural centers. Acrimonious racial relations and bias incidents; demands by Asian American, Chicana, and Latina students; and continued concern regarding the retention of students of color formulated the establishment of multicultural/cross-cultural centers (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Welch, 2008). In the 1980s, multicultural/cross-cultural centers were built as a possible panacea for racial relations and academic success for students of color at PWIs. Hefner (2002) reported that more than 400 Black and multicultural centers existed on college campuses

and many other institutions were considering the establishment of centers.

Similar to Black/mono/ethnic-specific and multi/cross-cultural centers, political movements inspired the proliferation of women's and LGBT centers on college campuses (Bengiveno, 2001; Kasper, 2004; Sanlo, 2000). Women's centers began to form in the 1970s as a result of increased feminist consciousness during the women's movement (Bengiveno). LGBT centers were established on college campuses during the 1990s as a result of concerns regarding campus climate and safety (Sanlo; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). The tragic hate murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 spearheaded the more recent growth of LGBT centers (Sanlo et al.). Currently, there are more than 400 women's centers and more than 100 LGBT centers on college campuses (Kasper; Sanlo et al.).

### *Cultural Centers Research*

Similar to the historical antecedents, Black/mono-ethnic/multicultural/cross-cultural, women's, and LGBT centers share limited empirical research on their functions and impact (Bengiveno, 2001; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Sanlo, 2000). However, the existing literature indicates that cultural centers share similar functions and impact on students. The three types of centers (mono/multi/cross-cultural, women's, and LGBT) offer programs and services that serve as safe spaces for their respective constituent groups (Jones et al.; June, 1996; Kasper, 2004; Sanlo). The existence or interest to form the three types of centers on college campuses call for increased research to examine the influence of all three centers on underserved students (Welch, 2008). This review focuses on Black/mono/ethnic-specific and multi/cross-cultural centers, which will collectively

be referred to as cultural centers.

While early literature on cultural centers was primarily scholarly opinion, recent empirical research has been published. Cultural center literature commenced with scholarly opinion articles authored by practitioners. These articles informed practitioners of the history, functions, and challenges of Black cultural centers and multicultural centers on PWI campuses (Princes, 1994; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Haynes, 1998; Young, 1989). Hord (2005) edited a book that compiled 15 articles regarding Black cultural centers (BCCs). Hord's book contributed to the literature on the history and the purpose of BCCs and informed the debate regarding Black/mono/ethnic-specific centers versus multicultural/cross-cultural centers (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Patton, 2006; Princes). Hord included one empirical study, which was a qualitative inquiry of three BCCs (Foote, 2005). Congruent with Turner (1994) and Jones and colleagues (2002), Foote confirmed the center's home-away-from-home function as an important mechanism to cope with a hostile campus climate. Black cultural centers neutralize a hostile campus climate by providing African American students and students of African descent with psychological, social, and cultural resources (Foote). Providing resources and a safe space is vital to the success of African American students and students of African descent (Patton).

Early empirical research on cultural centers evolved from unpublished doctoral dissertations by practitioners who employed qualitative research methods (Ago, 2002; June, 1996; Welch, 2008). Results of these dissertations support the retention and safe-space function of cultural centers (June; Welch). Ago's qualitative critical ethnographic empirical study involved historical document analysis and interviews of 49 faculty, staff,

and students at two private universities on the east coast. Congruent with the literature, Ago found that centers at both institutions increased student-of-color representation and contributed to diversity education through programming and services (Longerbeam et al., 2003; Young, 1989; Young, 1991).

June's (1996) qualitative ethnographic dissertation employed document analysis and interviews of 4 counselors of color and 11 students of color representing the 4 ethnic-specific centers at a Pacific Northwest public campus. Congruent with Patton (2006) and Turner (1994), students viewed the centers as a home away from home and a *safe haven* to interact with people who can empathize with their experiences and garner the support of the center's staff to increase persistence. Findings on the significance of cultural bonding and sense of community support the retention role of cultural centers (Jones et al., 2002; Patton; Turner). Similar to previous empirical studies, participants experienced daily forms of interpersonal and institutional oppression that caused feelings of self-hatred, alienation, stress, and other adverse psychological and sociological reactions (Foote, 2005; Patton; Smedley et al., 1993). These outcomes heighten the necessary retention and safe-space function of cultural centers.

A contemporary case-study dissertation utilizing interviews, document analysis, photo elicitation, and observations explored the retention function of the cross-cultural center, women's center, and LGBT center at one West coast public institution (Welch, 2008). Findings indicated that the three centers enhanced the sense of belonging for underrepresented students through acquaintance relationships and access to center resources. Welch's results supported previous data regarding cultural centers' impact on sense of belonging (Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994).

The dearth of published empirical cultural centers research was reflected in the existence of only two recent qualitative studies (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Jones and colleagues' pioneering cross-cultural center empirical study incorporated four ethnic-specific focus groups of students who utilize the cultural center to investigate campus climate and the center's role on their undergraduate experience. Congruent with Turner (1994), students reported an unwelcoming campus climate due to lack of faculty and student-of-color representation and an institutional disconnect between espoused theories of diversity and diversity theory in action (Argyris, as cited in Smith, 2001). Students reported satisfaction with the cross-cultural center and viewed the home-away-from-home environment as a valuable retention tool for students of color (June, 1996; Welch, 2008). Similar to Kasper's (2004) and Patton's findings, students expressed the necessity for placing centers in more prominent campus locations.

Patton's (2006) groundbreaking mono/ethnic-specific empirically published study employed a phenomenological case study through semistructured interviews of 11 students at one public university in the South. This study analyzed student perceptions of a BCC. Patton's results support the home-away-from-home and retention function of cultural centers (Jones et al, 2002; June, 1996; Turner, 1994; Welch, 2008). Students' preference for a BCC over a multicultural center contributed empirical data to the debate regarding mono/ethnic-specific centers versus multi/cross-cultural centers (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Princes, 1994). Patton also found that center staff contributes to creating a space that promotes belonging for Black students. Significant results regarding the location, size, and resources supported the call for a centralized location and adequate resources for cultural center functions (Kasper, 2004; Jones et al.; Sanlo, 2000).

Major themes and findings of the literature inform cultural center practitioners regarding the function and impact of cultural centers. The next section of this study discusses literature findings of the safe space, social justice education, training, and programmatic functions of cultural centers. The analysis also explores administrative challenges, advantages and disadvantages to multi/cross versus mono/ethnic-specific centers, center staff, and argues for further analysis of the retention function of centers.

### *Purpose and Function of Cultural Centers*

The literature described various functions and objectives of cultural centers. Cultural centers served as a safe space to advocate for the needs of underserved students (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Safe space was reflected in the home-away-from-home environment provided by cultural centers. The home-away-from-home environment was a place where students could be themselves, spend time with friends, fulfill various academic and cocurricular needs, relax, escape, and feel safe (Jones et al.; June, 1996; Patton).

Cultural centers reduced the sense of isolation, alienation, and lack of belonging for underserved students (June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). The safe space of cultural centers promoted retention of underserved students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June; Princes, 1994). Patton acknowledged the safe-space function of the cultural center for students to cope with racism, separatism, and apathy. Princes noted that Black cultural centers were established to ameliorate the retention problem for African American students. June found that cultural centers promote persistence through cultural bonding and sense of community. Welch reported that

student interaction and center resources increase sense of belonging.

Cultural centers promote the multicultural missions of universities and serve students through educational programs and training (Ago, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Princes, 1994). Programming and workshops addressing racism, cultural awareness, oppression, and inequity promote an inclusive campus climate (Jones et al.; Hurtado et al., 1998; Princes). Social justice learning outcomes are realized in various program and workshop formats, including: (a) film and lecture series; (b) cultural musical performances; and (c) dialogue groups (Jones et al.; June, 1996; Princes; Young, 1989; Young, 1991). Cultural centers support the cocurricular mission of student organizations. Patton (2006) found that the Black cultural center assisted multiple Black student organizations with educational programs and functions.

#### *Location, Size, and Operational Challenges of Cultural Centers*

Cultural centers were challenged by a variety of issues ranging from operational shortcomings to institutional and student attitudes. Location, size, and operational challenges plagued cultural centers (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). The relevance of cultural centers was questioned by their placement in remote campus locations (Jones et al.; Patton; Sanlo, 2000). Cultural centers need to be expanded and placed in centralized campus locations. Sanlo mentioned that LGBT centers were challenged by fluctuations in hours of service, resources, and staffing.

Deferment of institutional responsibility and student apathy served as challenges to cultural centers (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Princes, 1994). Jones and colleagues found a conflict between espoused and theory in action regarding

institutional commitment to diversity (Argyris, as cited in Smith, 2001). Students questioned institutional commitment to diversity by the underrepresentation of faculty of color and placing sole responsibility of diversity education on the cultural center. Conversely, Princes argued that the shift of student values from civil rights to materialism challenges the work of cultural centers. Student apathy and reactivity perpetuate a racist campus climate, which increases the importance of the safe-space function of cultural centers (Foote; Patton).

### *Mono/Ethnic-Specific Versus Multi/Cross*

Debates continued over the advantages and disadvantages regarding types of centers: monocultural/ethnic-specific versus multicultural/cross-cultural centers (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Patton, 2006; Princes, 1994). The scholarly opinion of Castillo-Cullather and Stuart used the nomenclature monocultural versus multicultural while Princes's scholarly opinion and Patton's qualitative study addressed the debate from a Black cultural center versus a multicultural center perspective.

Proponents of mono/Black cultural centers argued the advantages of providing a more focused and identifiable population and mission (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Patton, 2006). Focused services on a specific population increase the effectiveness of recruitment and retention of underserved students. Patton found that the Black cultural center decreased homesickness and supported Black first-year student transition to college. Population-specific programming and training created effective identity, community, and leadership development for a subset of underserved students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Patton). Another advantage to monocultural centers was effective



advocacy in meeting the needs of a specific underserved population (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart).

Proponents of multicultural centers raised the macroimpact of providing broader services to students of color and underserved populations (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Patton, 2006). Multicultural centers effectively build racial harmony, address acts of intolerance, and foster cross-cultural appreciation (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Princes, 1994; Welch, 2008). Multicultural centers increase understanding of interethnic commonalities and promote diversity awareness and identity development for students from multiple populations (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart; Princes). Similar to monocultural centers, Welch found that a cross-cultural center contributed to retention of underserved students through increased sense of belonging.

Challenges and critiques of mono/ethnic-specific and multi/cross cultural centers existed in the literature (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Princes, 1994). Mono/Black cultural centers are challenged by perceptions of separatism and isolationism in the societal context of multiculturalism. Multicultural centers are challenged by perceptions of institutional relevance and intercommunity battles over limited resources.

Debates regarding establishment and possible mergers of centers were discussed in the literature (Ago, 2002; Foote, 2005; Patton, 2006; Princes, 1994). Merging Black cultural centers into multicultural centers disregards and diminishes the cultural identity of the Black diaspora (Foote; Patton). Patton argued that merging Black cultural centers into multicultural centers assumes that all underserved student needs would be realized through a multicultural center. The ability of Black and ethnic-specific centers to meet the varied needs of an ethnic student population led to the recommendation of preserving

Black cultural centers (Foote; Patton; Princes). Ago addressed the challenge of having both ethnic-specific and multicultural centers on a campus. The addition of ethnic-specific centers questioned the relevance and possible redundancy of the multicultural center (Ago).

### *Center Staff*

Examination of empirical cultural center studies yielded knowledge regarding staff motivation, rewards, and perceptions by students and staff (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). Motivation and rewards for cultural center work evolved from staff members' perceived impact on the successful development of students (Longerbeam et al.). Staff gained a sense of purpose by bettering the world through teaching social justice. Cultural center staff members were lauded for their professionalism, genuine care and compassion of students, and welcoming personas (Jones et al.; June; Patton; Turner). Center staff created a home-away-from-home atmosphere that assisted in coping with a hostile campus climate (Patton; Turner). Patton found that staff creates a sense of belonging for Black students frequenting the black cultural center. A cultural center's mission was challenged by perceptions of an unwelcoming campus climate for center staff (Turner). Turner's and Patton's findings call for empirical analysis of the retention and sense of belonging function of cultural centers for students and staff.

Perceptions regarding the role of staff and recommendations regarding staff qualifications and training were noted in the literature (June, 1996; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Patton, 2006). Understanding the varied experiences and sharing similar cultural

background of the constituent group, friendly and welcoming persona, leadership, vision, and assessment skills were recommended when hiring center staff (June; Patton).

Longerbeam and colleagues found staff members assumed that they were devoid of prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. Longerbeam and associates' results raise the need for further analysis regarding cultural center staff training. Center staff perceived their role as establishing a welcoming atmosphere by creating positive rapport, problem solving, and referring students to additional campus resources. June concluded that staff caring and compassion realized the center's mission of recruitment, retention, and graduation of underserved students. The importance of center staff to promote student retention calls for examination of the retention literature.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Retention*

The abundance of empirical data on retention was largely influenced by Tinto's (1975) theoretical proposal, *Longitudinal Model of Dropouts*. Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Braxton and colleagues (2000) noted the numerous replication studies utilizing Tinto's (1975, 1993) retention theory. Synthesizing higher education retention research through the mid-1970s, Tinto (1975) proposed differential reasons for dropouts and identified distinctions in types of departures. Family background, individual attributes, and precollege schooling influenced educational goal and institutional commitment, which, then, impacted the academic and social integration of students. Continued interaction between academic and social integration with goal and institutional commitment determined the student's decision to drop out. Tinto's (1993) *A Longitudinal*

*Model of Institutional Departure* infused changes to goals/commitments, institutional experiences, and the inclusion of external influences (see Figure 2.1).

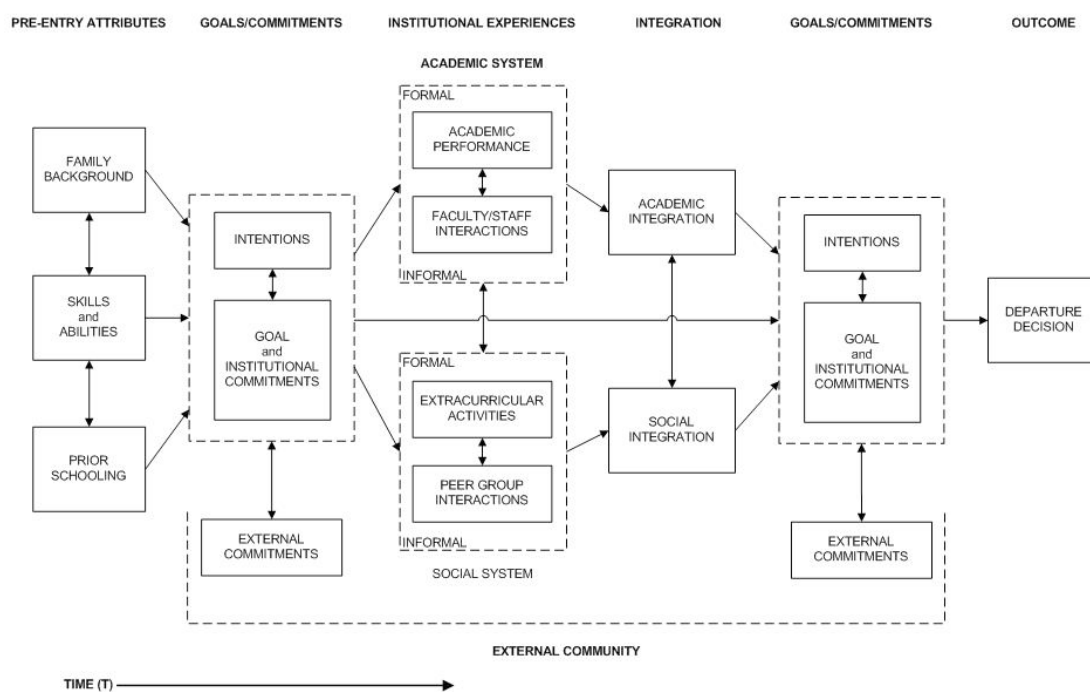


Figure 2.1. *A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure* (Tinto, 1993, p. 114).

Tinto's (1993) model commenced with the interaction of preentry attributes (family background, individual attributes, and prior schooling) with intentions, goals, institutional commitments, and external commitments. Family socioeconomic status, parental level of education, high school grade point average (GPA), and standardized college entrance examinations scores contributed to preentry attributes. High GPAs and examination scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) significantly related to retention (Cambiano, Denny, & DeVore, 2000; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Smedley et al., 1993; Stumpf & Stanley, 2002). Nora and research team (1996) found that high school GPA increased persistence for students of color. However, empirical studies also questioned the

relevance of GPA and other student preentry attributes to assess retention for students of color (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Preentry attributes in Tinto's (1993) model interact with goals/commitments. Tinto suggested that goals/commitments are the interaction of intentions regarding educational and career goals with institutional and external commitments. The model included perceptions of students' willingness to pursue educational and career goals. Institutional commitment referred to a student's "commitment to the institution in which he/she is enrolled" (p.43). Institutional commitment significantly influenced student persistence (Bean, 1983; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

Tinto (1993) recognized the influence of external commitments such as family, friends, and precollege involvements and organizations on retention. Tinto argued that persistence requires students to integrate into the institution's culture by rejecting external commitments. Researchers challenged the applicability of Tinto's separation of prior community to underserved students (Berger & Milem, 1999; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Chhuon and Hudley's qualitative analysis on Cambodian Americans and Hurtado and Carter's quantitative inquiry on Latina students found that external community factors positively contributed to retention. Berger and Milem challenged Tinto's integration in the institution by separation of community by finding that home backgrounds were a significant predictor of persistence. However, congruent with Tinto, Nora and colleagues (1996) found family responsibilities and working off-campus significantly detracted from student of color retention.

Tinto's model (1993) continued with goals/commitments interacting with institutional experiences. Institutional experiences were defined as academic systems and

social systems. Academic systems included formal academic performance and informal faculty/staff interaction. Faculty/staff interaction inside and outside the classroom had a positive influence on student retention (Bean, 1983; Belcheir & Michener, 1997; Berger & Milem, 1999; Walpole, 2003). The social system included formal cocurricular activities and peer group interactions. Definitions and the impact of cocurricular activities and peer interactions were grounded in Astin's (1975, 1984) longitudinal study on dropouts and theory on student involvement. Student involvement was defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Astin included faculty and student affairs staff interaction, living in the residence halls, participation in the honors program, and athletics as avenues for involvement. Involvement in ethnic student organizations and cultural centers were linked to positive institutional commitment and persistence (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994).

#### *Faculty/Staff Interaction and Retention*

Tinto's (1993) model included faculty and staff interaction as a component of the student's academic system within the institutional experience. The model argued that faculty and staff interaction impacts institutional experiences, thus influencing student persistence. Empirical data on the influence of faculty interaction with students yielded positive results for retention (Bean, 1983; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton et al., 2000; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Nora et al., 1996). Faculty interaction in the classroom impacted social integration, institutional commitment, and persistence (Braxton et al.). Walpole's (2003) results showed that the chances of students of low socioeconomic

status to attend graduate school increased with faculty interaction. Faculty interaction, compassion, remembering student faces and names, and interest in individual students' development related to sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Maestas et al., 2007). Berger and Milem noted that early involvement with faculty positively impacted institutional commitment. The influence of faculty interaction supported Astin's (1984) inclusion of faculty and student affairs staff as student involvement indicators. Berger and Milem argued that results of their study enhanced the use of Astin's theory of involvement to inform Tinto's (1975, 1993) a longitudinal model of institutional departure.

Limited research exists regarding cultural center staff influence on student retention. Astin (1984) included student affairs staff as an involvement variable that positively influenced retention. Empirical data regarding cultural centers and similar services suggested that staff positively influenced the retention and sense of belonging for underserved students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). Staff served as a proxy for parents, provided encouragement and advice, and assisted students through university procedures and requirements. Exploring the influence of cultural center staff on underserved student retention provides the groundwork for this empirical inquiry.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Tinto (1993) suggested that institutional experiences interacted with academic and social integration. Academic and social integration interacted with goals/commitments to determine student departure decisions. Academic and social integration was operationalized by empirical data on sense of belonging. Hausmann and colleagues

(2007) defined sense of belonging as “the psychological sense that one is a valued member of the community” (p. 804). Increased sense of belonging for students of color positively impacts academic and social integration for students of color at predominately White institutions (Hausmann et al.; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto) and at Hispanic-serving institutions (Maestas et al., 2007).

### *Early Theories*

The antecedent to research on sense of belonging within higher education was traced to Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation and Durkheim’s (1951) theory on suicide. Sense of belonging has been associated with Maslow’s description of human needs (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002). Maslow’s theory pioneered a hierarchy-of-needs pyramid to explain human motivation. This often cited, analyzed, and criticized psychological theory of a five-layer pyramid commences with physiological needs at the base and self-actualization at the apex (Best, Day, McCarthy, Darlington, & Pinchbeck, 2008; Brown & Cullen, 2006). Maslow argues satisfaction with most of the lower-level needs will motivate humans to strive for higher-level needs. Maslow notes belongingness in the third level of the pyramid, in which humans aspire to belong to places or groups. Prescott and Simpson (2004) argue that college students’ failure to meet the physiological and safety needs—the first two levels of the pyramid—contributes to insufficient social integration and, consequently, withdrawal. Maslow contends that unfilled belongingness may lead to psychological disorder (Hagerty et al.). The possible development of psychological disorder raises concerns regarding the literature on suicide and sense of belonging.



Durkheim's (1951) groundbreaking sociological theory on suicide argues that lack of moral consciousness and collective affiliation influences suicide ideation. In other words, failure to socially integrate into society impacts suicide ideation (Durkheim; Spady, 1970; Spady, 1971). Early retention and student attrition theories grounded their work in Durkheim's suicide theory (Spady, 1970; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). These retention theories substitute Durkheim's application of suicide to society and focus on lack of social and academic integration into a college or university (Bean, 1983). Inadequate integration or sense of belonging has been linked to Durkheim's theory of suicide (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Hausmann et al., 2007). Durkheim's theory guided Bollen and Hoyle's inclusion of sense of belonging in the analysis of perceived cohesion between samples in a college and a city. Hausmann and colleagues argued that lack of sense of belonging may lead to suicide ideation. While Durkheim's work evolved from sociology, a variety of academic disciplines examined sense of belonging.

### *Academic Disciplines*

Analysis of sense of belonging as a construct was found in multiple academic disciplines, including health (Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2005; Myer & Champion, 2008), psychology (Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, & Cummins, 2008; Watt & Badger, 2009), social psychology (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2008; Thompson & McRae, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2006), and K-12 education (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, & Campos, 2003). In the health arena, Hale and associates found that sense of belonging predicted more positive health perceptions for college students. Within psychology, studies analyzed sense of belonging with homesickness and

loneliness (Mellor et al.; Watt & Badger). Social psychology articles examined sense of belonging with television shows (Derrick et al.), affiliation with Black churches (Thompson & McRae) and the politics of social identity group affiliation (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Yuval-Davis). Within K-12 education, sense of belonging was coined as *school belonging*, which operationalizes as connectedness or affiliation to school, teacher support, and perceptions of fitting in (Anderman & Freeman; Morrison et al.; Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

### *Higher Education*

Development of sense of belonging in higher education research was found in Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) use of sense of belonging as a dimension for *perceived cohesion*. Perceived cohesion encompassed an individual's perceptions of belonging and feelings of morale associated with belonging to a social group (Bollen & Hoyle). Perceived cohesion assesses an individual's sense of belonging to various entities and the larger community. Hurtado and Carter (1997) were credited for institutionalizing the analysis of sense of belonging as a construct to higher education research, especially in relation to retention and campus climate (Hausmann et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Velasquez, 1999). Hurtado and Carter note the application of Bollen and Hoyle's perceived cohesion as grounding to their model of sense of belonging. A strong relationship was found between belonging and out of classroom course discussions, especially with student tutors. Religious, social, community, and fraternities/sororities found significant relationships with belonging. The study argued that higher selectivity for admission and hostile campus climate negatively impacts Latino transition. These

findings led to a proposed sense-of-belonging model that infused student background characteristics, transition issues, and campus climate.

Further refinement in the construct development of sense of belonging involved *valued involvement* and *fit* (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Hagerty et al., 2002). Hagerty and colleagues proposed that valued involvement and fit were the two critical components to sense of belonging and defined them as “(a) valued involvement or the experience of being valued and needed, and (b) fit, the person’s perception that his or her characteristics articulate with or complement the system or environment” (p. 174). The constructs of valued involvement and fit were infused into higher education sense-of-belonging research to analyze first-year students (Hoffman et al., 2002), test the construct called institutional commitment (Nora & Cabrera, 1993), and college choice and persistence (Nora, 2004). Nora introduced the concept *Habitus* as “the fit between a student’s values and belief system and his or her academic environment” (p. 182). Students with high personal and social fit indicated high levels of loyalty and a plan to reenroll at the same institution (Nora).

### *Instruments*

As the construct of sense of belonging continues to iterate, instruments to measure the construct vary. The most common instrument used to measure sense of belonging in higher education research was in the perceived cohesion scale (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990).

The instrument is worded as follows:

I feel a sense of belonging to \_\_\_\_\_.

I feel that I am a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ community.

I see myself as part of the \_\_\_\_\_ community (p. 485).

The perceived cohesion scale was used or adapted to measure sense of belonging with first-year African American and White students (Hausmann et al., 2007), at a Hispanic-serving institution (Maestas et al., 2007), first-year dominant and underrepresented students in biomedical and behavioral sciences (Hurtado et al., 2007), and Latino student perceptions of campus climate (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Hurtado and Ponjuan added *enthusiasm* and *recommendation of the university* as items in the scale. Johnson and research colleagues (2007) adapted Hurtado and Ponjuan's instrument by including *college comfort, choice, and support*.

Other studies used national data sets and created their own instrument to measure sense of belonging. Example data sets included: Preparing College Students for a Diverse Democracy (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008) and the National Survey of Hispanic Students and the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Two studies cited Hurtado and Carter's constructs as the base for development of their survey instruments (Johnson et al., 2007; Velasquez, 1999). Other studies used the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (Ostrove & Long, 2007), Interpersonal Support Evaluation List College Version and Miller Social Intimacy Scale (Hale et al., 2005), and the Campus Connectedness Scale (Lee & Davis, 2000). Hoffman and colleagues' (2002) main objective was to develop a sense-of-belonging instrument to increase understanding of college students' persistence. Review of the literature and focus groups grounded the creation of a 50-item instrument measuring student/peer relations and a 35-item measure for student/faculty relationships. Schussler and Fierros (2008) implemented a Learning Communities survey with items from the Goodenow

Psychological School Membership Survey (Goodenow, 1993). The literature revealed only one qualitative investigation of sense of belonging and underserved university students (Welch, 2008). The proposed study addresses the need for increased qualitative analysis of sense of belonging and underserved university students.

### *Student Populations*

Examination of sense of belonging with underserved students ranges from ethnic-specific and cross-race samples to socioeconomic status. Ethnic-specific analyses were conducted on Latino students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Velasquez, 1999), African American students and students of African descent (Hausmann et al., 2007; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002), Asian American students (Lee & Davis, 2000), and Arab and Muslim students (Shammas, 2009). Latino students with a well-developed ethnic identity, frequent interaction with diverse peers and faculty, who live on campus, who engage in cocurricular activities, and who took diversity-studies courses reported a significant sense of belonging to the campus (Hurtado & Carter; Hurtado & Ponjuan; Maestas et al.; Strayhorn; Velasquez). Conversely, Strayhorn found that Latino students living on campus did not feel a significant sense of belonging to the campus. Hurtado and Carter also found that highly selective universities reduced the sense of belonging for Latino students. Congruent with Velasquez, Lee and Davis found that Asian American students with strong cultural orientations correlated significantly with sense of belonging. Similar to Hurtado and Ponjuan, parental support and interaction with diverse peers significantly

influence African American student sense of belonging (Mendoza-Denton et al.; Hausmann et al.).

Underserved students were included in samples that compared results with White students (Hurtado et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008). Mixed results regarding the influence of cross-race interaction and sense of belonging exist in the literature. Congruent with Hurtado and Carter (1997), literature exists claiming that interaction with diverse peers significantly increases students' sense of belonging regardless of race (Hurtado et al.; Locks et al.; Maestas et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). However, Johnson and colleagues found that cross-race interaction does not significantly impact student-of-color sense of belonging. Hurtado and colleagues also found that academic integration regardless of race increases sense of belonging. Interacting with graduate students or teaching assistants and receiving advice from first-year and advanced-standing students increased sense of belonging for underserved students in the sciences. Perceived racial tension and hostile campus climate decreased sense of belonging for all racial groups (Hurtado et al.; Locks et al.).

Welcoming campus climates increased sense of belonging for students of color (Hurtado, 1994; Johnson et al., 2007) and hostile campus climates decreased student sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jones et al., 2002). Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that Latino students engaged in diversity cocurricular programs increased the perception of a hostile campus climate. The researchers speculated that students chose to engage in diversity cocurricular programs as a way to resist the unwelcoming campus climate. Hurtado (1994) defined campus climate as "a product of various elements that include the historical, structural, perceptual and

behavioral dimensions of the college environment ... (that) can affect a student's psychological response to the environment" (p. 22). Hurtado and colleagues (1998) called on cultural centers to create warmer campus climates through cross-race programs and initiatives. Cultural centers serve as a safe space from unwelcoming campus climates and increase sense of belonging for underserved students (Jones et al.; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994).

Other empirical analyses included predominately White samples or excluded ethnic demographic information and focused their sense of belonging research on academic integration and success (Hoffman et al., 2002; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). Residential and nonresidential learning communities enhanced peer and faculty relationships, which increased academic and social integration (Hoffman et al.; Schussler & Fierros). Ostrove and Long concluded that socioeconomic status strongly relates to college students' sense of belonging. Sense of belonging was linked to positive self-perceptions of academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, perception of instructors' warmth, social acceptance, scholastic competence, academic adjustment, and academic performance (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Ostrove & Long; Pittman & Richmond). These results were congruent with findings that grades and time spent studying positively impact sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). However, Johnson and colleagues (2007) found that faculty interaction with first-year students was not significantly related to sense of belonging, except for Hispanic/Latino students.

While the literature includes multiple quantitative analyses of sense of belonging and first-year students, only one qualitative first-year student sense-of-belonging study

existed (Hoffman et al., 2007). Frequent faculty interaction and high academic integration was associated with higher levels of sense of belonging for first-year students (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al.; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). First-year African American, Latino, and Asian American students reported less sense of belonging than first-year White students (Johnson et al., 2007). However, Hausmann and colleagues found no significant differences in sense of belonging between first-year White and African American students, except for peer and family support. The varied race-based results and lack of qualitative first-year student sense-of-belonging analysis called for this study's investigation of first- and second-year underserved student sense of belonging.

#### *Cocurricular Involvement*

The literature contained investigations regarding sense of belonging and cocurricular programs. Participation in various cocurricular programs significantly related to sense of belonging, including: fraternities/sororities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007), being a campus leader (Maestas et al.), athletics (Hagerty et al., 2002), cultural centers (Welch, 2008), and living in the residence halls (Johnson et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas et al.; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). However, Johnson and colleagues found that cocurricular involvement increases sense of belonging for Asian Pacific American and White/Caucasian students but not for Latino, African American, and Native American students. Research also indicated that living on campus for Latino students did not result in increased sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). However, first-year students in *high-impact* living-learning residential communities reported greater sense of belonging than *low-impact* communities



(Schussler & Fierros). Students involved with cultural centers were also found to increase sense of belonging (Welch).

The varied results of the sense-of-belonging literature warrant further empirical analysis on this important construct. My study seeks to answer the call of previous researchers for increased analysis of sense of belonging on underserved students and students of color (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Welch, 2008). However, the analysis of sense of belonging was muddled by research that interchangeably used sense of belonging with mattering and/or referred to mattering constructs to define sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2007; Rendon, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008). Thus, this study reviewed the literature on mattering, especially in relation to underserved students.

### *Mattering*

Higher education research credits the genesis of mattering as a theoretical framework to Rosenberg and McCullough (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Rosenberg and McCullough define mattering as “a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension” (p. 165). Several empirical studies examining mattering with college students used Rosenberg and McCullough’s definition (Gossett et al., 1996; Phillips, 2005; Schlossberg). Rosenberg and McCullough proposed three characteristics of mattering:

Attention: The feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person (p. 164).

Importance: To believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do or is concerned with our fate (p. 164).

Dependence: Our behavior is influenced by our dependence on other people (p. 165).

Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) groundbreaking study introduced mattering as a concept and informed other studies related to parents and adolescents (Marshall, 2001; Marshall & Lambert, 2006). Grounded in the field of sociology, Rosenberg and McCullough implemented a quantitative longitudinal theoretical replication study by assessing high school students in four states. Adolescents who believed they mattered little to their parents produced significant correlations with unhappiness, depression, anxiety, and delinquency. Related to this inquiry, a weak ordinal relationship existed between socioeconomic status and mattering. Higher-class adolescents felt stronger parental mattering than middle- and lower-class adolescents.

### *Higher Education Research*

Schlossberg (1989) is recognized for initiating the application of mattering into higher education research (Phillips, 2005; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Based on interviews of adult college students age 23 years or older (Schlossberg & Warren, 1985), Schlossberg added two more constructs to Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) original three constructs of mattering. Schlossberg's two additional constructs are defined as follows:

Ego-Extension: Refers to the feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures (Schlossberg, p. 10).

Appreciation: We feel that others are thankful for what we are and what we do

(Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 22).

Early research using mattering as a theoretical framework further assessed the theories applicability to adult students and compared traditional and nontraditional students. Warner and Williams (1995) further examined mattering on adult students and found that they mattered most to peers. Butcher (1997) researched the applicability of mattering on students outside the norm group (adult students) by comparing traditionally aged and nontraditionally aged students. In this exploratory dissertation, Butcher found no significant differences in mattering between traditional and nontraditional students.

### *Student Populations*

Early comparisons of ethnic groups revealed that non-African American students feel a stronger sense of mattering than African American and students of African descent (Cuyjet, 1998; Gossett et al., 1996). While Gossett and colleagues found significant differences between African American and non-African American students in all mattering scales (administration, peer, advising, classroom, faculty, services), Cuyjet found significant differences in all scales except advising. In a replication study, Phillips (2005) found the same results of Cuyjet, as African American and White students were significantly different in all areas except advising. The resultant African American student feelings of marginalization call for increased underserved student services, programs to promote faculty interaction, and systems to enhance the academic and social integration of African American students (Cuyjet; Gossett et al.; Phillips). With only 60% of African American students reporting “at home” on campus, Gossett and colleagues suggested an examination of Black cultural centers’ impact on African American

students' feelings of home and mattering.

Analysis of first-year students and mattering predominately focused on stress and wellness. Congruent with Warner and Williams's (1995) results of peers and mattering, Rayle and Chung (2007) found that college friend social support was the most significant predictor for feelings of mattering in first-year students. Rayle and Chung also found that mattering increases when first-year students feel supported by family and high school friends. These results challenge Tinto's (1993) concept of separation of external community and retention. Expanding on the benefits of external community, Rayle and Chung found that family and friend support decreases academic stress. In comparison studies of Citadel and West Point first-year cadets, no significant differences were found in perceived stress or mattering (Gibson & Myers, 2006; Myers & Bechtel, 2004). However, cadets at both institutions scored higher on the mattering scales than norm groups at nonmilitary institutions. Fetty (2005) found that first-year students living on campus and working less than 20 hours per week scored significantly higher on the mattering measures than students living off campus and working more than 20 hours per week. Fetty's findings support Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, which links living in the residence halls with positive institutional commitment and persistence. In addition, residential student experiences are associated with a greater sense of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). Fetty also stated that sense of belonging could increase student feelings of mattering.

The literature reveals a significant difference between males and females with mattering. Females in high school (Marshall, 2001), first-year university (Rayle & Chung, 2007), traditional college students (Butcher, 1997; Dixon & Kurpius, 2008), and

nontraditional college students (Butcher) feel more mattering than males. Conversely, traditional women college students reported more depression and college stress than nontraditional male college students (Dixon & Kurpius). No studies addressed feelings of mattering in transgender students.

### *Instruments*

Studies on mattering were limited to quantitative analyses using four different instruments. Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec (1989) developed the Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education to measure Schlossberg's (1989) theory of mattering. Normed on interviews of nontraditional college students, this instrument was used to analyze nontraditional students (Warner & Williams, 1995) and a comparison on traditional and nontraditional students' feelings of mattering (Butcher, 1997). Based on Schlossberg's five components of mattering, the Perception on Community/Environment of Undergraduate Students in Higher Education was developed to assess student perceptions of mattering (Cuyjet, 1994). To apply the instrument in assessing African American student mattering, items of the instrument referenced ethnicity. This instrument was used to compare African American and non-African American/White student perceptions of mattering (Cuyjet, 1998; Gossett et al., 1996; Phillips, 2005). Rayle and Chung (2007) used the Interpersonal and General Mattering Instrument (Rayle, 2004) to assess first-year college students' mattering. Developed for measurement of mattering in social psychology, the General Mattering Scale (Marcus, 1991) was used to measure mattering with traditional college students (Dixon & Kurpius, 2008), Citadel cadets (Gibson & Myers, 2006), and West Point cadets (Myers & Bechtel, 2004). No

instruments were found for any higher education qualitative or mixed methods studies investigating mattering as a construct.

The lack of qualitative analyses of university students and mattering contributes to the necessity of this study. I did not find any qualitative analysis of university students utilizing mattering in my literature search. The nonexistence of a qualitative study on college students and mattering justifies the need for this inquiry of mattering and underserved university students. This study answers the call for increased empirical analysis of mattering with students of color and cultural centers (Butcher, 1997; Fetty, 2005; Gossett et al., 1996; Rayle & Chung, 2007).

### Summary

An examination of the literature revealed a dearth of analyses on university and college cultural centers. Informed initially by practitioner scholarly opinion pieces (Princes, 1994; Stennis-Williams et al., 1998; Young; 1989; Young, 1991), cultural center literature predominately consisted of limited qualitative unpublished doctoral dissertations (Ago, 2002; June, 1996; Welch, 2008) and published book and journal articles (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Nonetheless, the vision of civil rights leaders and student activists who established cultural centers to meet the needs of underserved students continues to be realized (Ago; Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al.; June; Patton). Through programming and staff services, cultural centers increased sense of belonging and retention (Jones et al.; June; Patton; Turner, 1994; Welch).

The constructs of this study's conceptual framework were well-represented by

numerous quantitative published articles. The retention literature was grounded by Tinto's (1975, 1993) *A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure*. Multiple references and replication studies using Tinto (1975, 1993) informed the examination of the model for underserved students. Varying results existed for sense of belonging analysis with students of color. Qualitative analyses of sense of belonging and cultural centers were limited to one doctoral dissertation (Welch, 2008). Welch focused on the cross-cultural center, women's center, and LGBT center at one public four-year university. While less extensive than the sense-of-belonging literature, quantitative published articles on mattering and students of color existed (Cuyjet, 1998; Gossett et al., 1996; Phillips, 2005). I did not find any qualitative studies or cross-cultural center analyses with mattering in the conceptual framework.

The dearth of cultural center research and quantitatively based literature on retention, sense of belonging, and mattering justifies the need for this study. Expanding on Welch's (2008) dissertation on cultural centers and sense of belonging, this study contributes further analysis of sense of belonging, initiates the investigation of mattering and cultural centers, expands the limited qualitative literature on sense of belonging and mattering, and pioneers a grounded theory analysis of cultural centers and underserved students. This study also furthers the understanding of the influence of Center staff on the sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students. Furthermore, this study expands on the limited qualitative sense of belonging and mattering studies on first-year students.

The study's methodology for examining cultural center and cultural center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students will be explained

in detail in the next chapter. Chapter 3 will describe the qualitative constructivist grounded theory methodology for this study.



## CHAPTER 3

### Methods

This chapter briefly reviews the study's problem, purpose, and research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the qualitative epistemology, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations of this qualitative constructivist grounded theory inquiry focused on retention (Tinto, 1993), sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989) for underserved students in university cross-cultural centers.

The educational achievement gap for an increasing underserved population calls for this analysis on the influence of university cross-cultural centers in narrowing the achievement gap. The literature described the retention function of cultural centers as a mechanism to address the achievement gap (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Princes, 1994). While several studies explored the role of sense of belonging as a retention function in cultural centers (June; Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008), literature is nonexistent regarding the influence of cultural centers and mattering when it comes to addressing the retention of underserved students. This inquiry contributes to the dearth of literature on university cultural centers, expands the limited qualitative analysis of first-year students with sense of belonging and mattering, and increases practitioner knowledge of how sense of belonging and mattering influences underserved student retention.

### Methodology

### *Qualitative*

This study used qualitative approaches to examine the research questions. Qualitative data focus on “naturally occurring ordinary events in natural settings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This study examined the ordinary events of underserved students’ lives in the natural setting of university cultural centers. The methods explored the lived experiences of underserved students in university cultural centers (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative data also generates or revises theoretical frameworks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Theories of retention, sense of belonging, and mattering were examined using qualitative analysis. Words and stories from participants and documents involved in this study assisted in explaining the influence of centers and staff on underserved students (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The epistemology and surrounding discussion, which serve to further define and frame this work, may also be conceptualized as theoretical frameworks for a qualitative inquiry literature review on their own accord; but in the present inquiry the epistemology serves to inform and scaffold qualitative research methodology.

### *Critical Theory*

The macroepistemological framework used to analyze the study’s research questions was critical theory. Recognizing critical theory’s tenants of power, privilege, and oppression, this epistemological lens is congruent with the purpose of this study (Grbich, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Seeking to confront the injustice of the educational achievement gap, cultural centers are analyzed as a possible source to challenge the status quo and inequitable institutionalized educational

system. Analyzing cultural centers as retention sources for underserved students promotes critical theories objectives to decrease suffering and “use ... human wisdom in the process of bringing about a better and more just world” (Kincheloe & McLaren, p. 309).

Critical theory as an epistemology parallels the research design of constructivist grounded theory. Critical theory’s perspectives regarding the fluidity, evolving nature of relationships and the centrality of language to form knowledge are congruent with this study’s constructivist grounded theory research design (Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Analyzing grounded theory through critical theory epistemology is the most effective method for studying underserved students (Fassinger, 2005).

### *Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory methods were selected to develop an emerging theory of cultural center retention. Grounded theory is a qualitative systematic process to develop theory grounded in the experience of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory methodology is often utilized to “explore and understand how complex phenomenon occur” (Brown et al., 2002, p. 174). This study examines the phenomenon of mattering and sense of belonging for underserved students occurring in a university cross-cultural center.

Grounded theory methods were implemented for this study due to the dearth of literature on cultural center and staff influence on mattering and sense of belonging for underserved students (Grbich, 2007). Additionally, the need to examine the interaction of

center staff and underserved students justified the grounded theory methodology for this study (Grbich). A critical theory epistemology called for a grounded theory methodology with congruent procedures and perspectives.

### *Constructivist Grounded Theory*

Constructivist grounded theory data methods profess flexible guidelines to advance social justice oriented inquires (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Charmaz (2005) defines constructivist grounded theory as “a systematic approach to social justice inquiry that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions in our analyses” (p. 510). Similar to critical theory, constructivist grounded theory recognizes that meaning and interaction are mediated by power, hierarchy, and oppression (Charmaz, 2005). Constructivist grounded theories methodologies serve as a vehicle to reveal societal inequities such as the educational achievement gap (Charmaz, 2005; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Through the lens of a critical theory epistemological framework, this study implemented a constructivist grounded theory qualitative analysis to investigate the research questions.

### Research Questions

The research questions for this study include:

1. In what ways does a cross-cultural center influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
2. In what ways does a cross-cultural center staff influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?

3. How do underserved students relate to mattering and sense of belonging constructs? Are there other constructs that may explain underserved student retention?

### Research Design

A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used to generate an emerging theory of cultural center retention. This study uses constructivist grounded theory's primary data gathering method—interviews—to understand the meaning of participant experiences in the context of the center and institution (Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2006).

Two additional data gathering methods provided multiple measures to analyze the theoretical framework of sense of belonging and mattering with cross-cultural centers and underserved students. The data gathering methods were: (a) focus groups; (b) interviews; and (c) document analysis.

### *Research Site*

The study was conducted at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). CSUSM is one of the 23 teaching-based campuses in the California State University system. Of the more than 9,000 enrolled students, 49% are White, 38% are students of color, 10% are race/ethnicity unknown, and 3% are international (CSUSM, 2008).

The specific research context was at the Cross-Cultural Center at CSUSM. The CSUSM Cross-Cultural Center is located in the University Commons building, specifically in the room designated as Commons 207 (retrieved December 4, 2009, from <http://www.csusm.edu/sll/mc/c3.html>). The CSUSM Cross-Cultural Center provides

resources and services to “foster an inclusive environment” and represent the region’s diversity through a social justice context (retrieved December 4, 2009, from <http://www.csusm.edu/sll/mc/c3.html>).

### *Positionality*

Professional experience in two cross-cultural centers and one LGBT resource center (LGBTRC) at two public higher education institutions initiated this examination into the positive influence of cultural centers on students. In an era of increasing demand for accountability and assessment, it is imperative to engage in empirical research that explains the practical and anecdotal evidence regarding cultural centers and retention.

Former and current practical experiences impact the positionality of the researcher. As a former center director, I bring practical emic, or insider experience as the researcher (Creswell, 2008). However, in my current position as the Associate Dean of Students at CSUSM, I do not oversee or supervise the CSUSM Cross-Cultural Center. The lack of oversight or responsibilities for the Cross-Cultural Center also creates an etic, or an outsider positionality (Creswell). As an administrator without oversight to the Center, there is no conflict of interest with the research and my leadership practice. My advantageous positionality addresses concerns of reporting favorable or biased results to benefit my work environment (Anderson & Jones, 2000). However, my role as an administrator at CSUSM may present a power relationship with CSUSM students that threaten the study’s credibility (Anderson & Jones; Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the researcher applied safeguards to reduce feelings of coercion and power from the research process. The specific safeguards will be discussed later in this chapter.

### *Sampling Design*

A purposeful sampling design was implemented for this study. Purposeful sampling enriches the understanding of qualitative phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). This study implemented a purposeful design called theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling allows for the generation of concepts, categories and theories (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell). Generalizability to other populations is not a function of theoretical sampling (Charmaz). Congruent with theoretical sampling methods, this researcher analyzed data, employed memo writing, and allowed the emerging categories to influence the sampling (Charmaz; Creswell).

### *Participants*

Participants were students and staff at CSUSM. First- and second-year students participated in two focus group sessions. Student staff participated in one focus group session. The one full-time staff member of the CSUSM Cross-Cultural Center was individually interviewed. Participants were selected through the recruitment process of the study. Underserved students were the target population for this study. Bragg and colleagues (2005) defined underserved students as “financially disadvantaged, racial minorities, and first-generation individuals who are not represented in colleges and universities in proportion to their representation in the K-12 educational system or in society at large” (p. 6). Focusing on underserved students will answer the research questions and contribute to forming a theory for cultural center retention.

## Data Collection

### *Focus Groups*

This qualitative study employed three different data-gathering methods, which include: focus groups, interviews, and document analysis. Focus groups were conducted for first- and second-year students and student staff of the Center. Focus groups yield the best results from interaction of the participants, participants with similarities, and participants that may be hesitant to self-disclose (Creswell, 2008). The similarity of years of experience at the university for first- and second-year students and student staff promoted interaction and self-disclosure.

First- and second-year participants were recruited using four methods. First, the Center staff approached students to participate in the focus group using a recruitment flyer and script (see Appendix A). Second, the researcher posted the recruitment flyer on a Center bulletin board. Third, the researcher randomly approached students at fall semester events and recruited participants for the study. First- and second-year student participants received the recruitment flyer and the researcher's business card (see Appendix A & B). Fourth, the researcher recruited students during open hours of the Centers using the recruitment flyer and script (see Appendix A & B). A cohort focus group study design was utilized for the first- and second-year participants (Creswell, 2008). The same four first- and second-year students participated in two focus group sessions.

The first focus group occurred in late fall semester 2009. Questions in the first focus group assessed students' initial thoughts of the centers, sense of belonging, and



matter. At the beginning of the focus group session, the researcher explained the focus group process, voluntary nature of their participation, and confidentiality (see Appendix C). Participants submitted or completed a demographics form and CSUSM Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D & E). The researcher emailed the demographics form and CSUSM Informed Consent Form to participants at least one week before the scheduled focus group. Participants voluntarily responded to approximately six focus group questions (see Appendix F).

The second focus group of the same first- and second-year students occurred in spring semester 2010. The process of informing the participants about the study's purpose was repeated (see Appendix C). Approximately six interview questions in the second focus group assessed students' sense of belonging and mattering (see Appendix G). The proposed third focus group of the first- and second-year students did not occur since theoretical sampling reached saturation (Creswell, 2008).

The three student staff members of the Cross-Cultural Center participated in a focus group during spring semester 2010. The interview protocol was informed by a pilot study conducted in spring 2009. Questions were further developed through theoretical sampling methods (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008). Review and analysis of first- and second-year student focus groups influenced the formation of questions and validated the need to interview all three student staff members.

Permission to interview the student staff was obtained through the appropriate university administrator. Participants were informed of the study in similar fashion to the first- and second-year students; however, the forms were adapted to reflect their student

staff status (see Appendix H-K). Focus group data were transcribed by a professional transcription service and coded by hand.

### *Interview*

An interview of the one full-time Cross-Cultural Center staff member was also conducted in spring semester 2010. The interview protocol was informed by a pilot study and initial analysis of the focus group data. Questions were similar to the student staff focus group with two additional questions regarding theories (see Appendix L). The participant was informed of the study in similar fashion to the student staff (see Appendix H-J).

### *Document Analysis*

Documentation provides the researcher with data that is stable, concise, and unobtrusive (Yin, 2009). Document analysis aids in understanding the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2008). This researcher remained cognizant of the potential disadvantages of document analysis, which include: (a) difficulty in finding the document; (b) bias; and (c) denial of access (Yin). The administrator and staff of the Cross-Cultural Center assisted with overcoming these potential disadvantages by providing easy access to available documents. Document analysis of the Centers' historical and contemporary literature was analyzed in spring semester 2010. Founding documents, contemporary brochures, and website information yielded further insight to the study's emerging theory.

Document analysis was implemented to increase credibility of the grounded theory analysis. Twelve historical and contemporary documents of the Cross-Cultural Center were used. The oldest document was a draft proposal for the establishment of Multicultural Programs dated June 23, 2003. Four historical documents provided context to the establishment of Multicultural Programs and the opening of the Cross-Cultural Center. Two annual plan reports included information about Center goals, programs, budget, and assessment. Four concept papers explained the relationship between Center programs and initiatives with institutional strategic priorities, student learning outcomes, and student development theory. Another document was an assessment of Center programs in fall 2008 and the last document was the 2010 Center brochure. Documents were coded and analyzed by hand.

### Data Analysis

This section describes the data analysis process for this study. Data analysis commenced with coding the data. Coding assigns labels to the data in order to provide meaning and information to address the study's research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Implementing constructivist grounded theory data analysis methods, this study followed a three-step coding process: (a) initial; (b) focused; and (c) theoretical (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009).

The initial coding process entailed a line-by-line coding process in which a code was associated to each line (Charmaz, 2006). Each line was assigned *in vivo* codes, which are the actual words or phrases from the participants (Creswell, 2008; Strauss, 1987). The

initial *in vivo* coding process yielded 977 codes. Of those codes, 543 were from the focus group and interview data and 434 were derived from document analysis.

The secondary coding cycle method used for this constructivist grounded theory study was *focused coding*. Focused coding is the process of labeling “the most significant earlier codes ... to make the most analytic sense” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Memo writing was a method used to assist this researcher with the focused coding process. Memo writing assists the researcher with reflecting and refining codes, categories, and themes that may ultimately produce a theory (Saldaña, 2009). This researcher produced 36 memos during the coding process. Thirty-three of the analytic memos assisted the researcher to produce 24 categorical codes. Memo writing guided the researcher with reducing the initial/*in vivo* codes into 24 categorical codes.

The third and final coding procedure for this study was *theoretical coding*. Theoretical coding synthesizes categorical codes and establishes code relationships that move the study toward generating a theory (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Through memos and the coding process, five theoretical codes were produced. The five theoretical codes were: (a) community; (b) space; (c) programs; (d) distributed relational leadership; and (e) identity development.

The central or core theoretical category in this study was *Distributed Relational Leadership*. The central or core category is the “primary theme of the research” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 163). Distributed relational leadership served as the central or core theoretical category because of the strong connection to the various categorical codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Central or core theoretical categories also explain the study’s phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Distributed relational leadership explained the sense of

belonging, mattering, and retention phenomena in the context of the Cross-Cultural Center.

### Trustworthiness

Evaluation of qualitative inquires are often measured through the concept of trustworthiness (Brown et al., 2002; Creswell, 2008). Trustworthiness is often equated with reliability and validity. However, trustworthiness is more appropriate than reliability and validity for evaluating grounded theory (Brown et al.). Grounded theory trustworthiness is enhanced through amount of time spent with the research, triangulation of multiple forms of data, and recognition of the epistemological lens and bias of the researcher (Edwards, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba argue that trustworthiness is accomplished through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness of this study's grounded theory data will be explored through Lincoln and Guba's four constructs below.

### *Credibility*

Credibility evaluates accuracy of the theory's explanation of the study's phenomenon (Brown et al., 2002; Stevens, 2000). Credibility is met through intimate familiarity with the setting and topic (Charmaz, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is often used to meet the criteria of credibility (Brown et al.). Member checking is the process in which participants review the accuracy of the study's data (Creswell, 2008). This study implemented member checks to insure accuracy of the focus group transcripts. Accuracy and familiarity of the study's results are often accomplished

through triangulation of the data (Lincoln & Guba). Triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple types of people and/or methods (Creswell). This study garnered data from multiple types of people and methods. Focus groups, an interview, and document analysis of first- and second-year students, student staff, and one full-time staff triangulated and added credibility to the study's results.

### *Transferability*

Transferability refers to the applicability of results across settings (Brown et al., 2002). Gathering the perspectives of diverse participants contributes to transferability of the study (Brown et al.; Stevens, 2000). This study included participants representing diverse positionalities with the Center. Students, student staff, and full-time staff participated in this study. Moreover, the participants' diverse social identities enhanced the study's transferability. Details regarding participant social identities will be reported in Chapter 4. Descriptions of the research, participants, methodology, results, and emerging theory also contributed to this study's transferability (Brown et al.; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Dependability*

Verification of grounded theory methods and ensuring that the data represents the changing nature of the study's phenomenon increases dependability (Brown et al, 2002; Edwards, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of this study was validated through detailed descriptions of the constructivist grounded theory coding process. Chapter 4 further explains the codes, categories, and emerging theory from this study.

The rigor of the methodology supports a possible audit that would confirm dependability of results (Brown et al.; Lincoln & Guba).

### *Confirmability*

When another researcher can confirm the study's results using the same data, confirmability is met (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail increases the confirmability of the research (Brown et al., 2002). The audit trail for this study includes the raw data (audio and written transcripts, notes from the focus groups and interviews, and documents) and coding notes and memos for each stage of the process. Confirmability is also reached when the results reflect the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's subjectivity (Brown et al.). Congruent with a constructivist grounded theory methodology, *in vivo* coding initiated a process to ensure that the participants' experiences were reflected in the results.

### Ethical Considerations

#### *Risks and Confidentiality*

This study addressed concerns of potential harm and risks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A potential risk for participants was the allocation of their time. Participants spent approximately 1.5 to 3 hours on this study. Another potential risk was social identity disclosure. In disclosing academics, income, gender identity, and other demographic information, participants may have experienced anxiety or other physical or psychological reactions. Finally, students and staff may have felt coerced into

participating in this study. Students may have experienced discomfort or an obligation to participate in the study when the researcher attempted to recruit them for the study.

Qualitative studies need to consider ethical issues of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher was cognizant of three potential risks associated with participant privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity: (a) audio and video recording; (b) identity disclosure; and (c) interview transcription service. The recording of interviews may have caused participants to be concerned about confidentiality. In disclosing personal information, participants may have worried about being identified in the study. Utilization of a professional transcription service may have caused participant concern for confidentiality.

### *Safeguards*

This study implemented safeguards to minimize harm and protect confidentiality. To minimize concerns for time, the researcher clearly stated the amount of participation time for the study before and during the research process. The researcher monitored the time during the interview process. If the allocated time expired and the interview was still occurring, the researcher stressed the voluntary nature of staying beyond the anticipated allocated time to complete the interviews. To allay risks of social identity disclosure during video and audio recording, interview and focus group responses were kept confidential and available only to the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor for analysis purposes. Interview recordings were stored in a safe place. Only the researcher analyzed the information provided by the participants. Interview responses were not linked to the participant's name or address. Participants were



informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point or may decline to answer any question. The focus group format facilitated a nonresponse without putting an individual participant on the spot. Confidentiality regarding student responses was addressed by not providing the transcription service with participant name, address, or any other private form of identification.

To increase the anonymity of the study participants, alphabetical letters were selected for each participant (see Appendix C, D, & I). Students and student staff members participating in focus groups selected letters (A-D) as their identification for the study. Students and student staff referred to themselves and each other by their chosen letter. Thus, names and pseudonyms were not used during the focus groups. The elimination of names and pseudonyms and use of letters enhance the anonymity of the student participants.

The demographics form may have elicited the most psychological or physical response. The demographics form asked participants for sensitive personal information such as high school grade point average, scholastic aptitude test score, family income, and parents' level of education. It was necessary to gather this personal data to confirm that the participants met the criteria of the study. Participants of the study were underserved students as defined by Bragg and colleagues (2005) as "financially disadvantaged, racial/minorities, and first-generation individuals who are not represented in colleges and universities in proportion to their representation in the K-12 educational system or in society at large" (p. 6). Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) informed the researcher's ability to assess financially disadvantaged students through estimated family income. Due to the sensitive nature of the demographics form's

questions, potential participants received the form and CSUSM Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D, E, I, & J) at least one week in advance of the focus group and interview. This allowed for participants to react and ask questions to the researcher regarding use of the information. Participants were encouraged to answer all demographic questions but were allowed to omit any items.

### *Benefits and Incentives*

This qualitative study provided benefits and incentives to the participants and researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Benefits and incentives for focus group participants included food and drink at each session and eligibility for a \$25 campus bookstore gift card. Two participants from the first- and second-year student focus group received \$25 bookstore gift cards. Participants also benefited through the sharing of Cross-Cultural Center-related stories with each other. Completion of the dissertation benefited the researcher for fulfillment of partial requirements for the doctoral degree.

### Summary

A rising underserved student population signifies the need for increased research on services and programs to narrow the educational achievement gap (Jones et al., 2002; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Historical antecedents and contemporary functions of cultural centers name university cultural centers as a source to promote retention of underserved students (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996). Limited literature exists regarding cultural center influence on retention

and sense of belonging (June; Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). Moreover, examinations of mattering on underserved students and/or cultural centers are nonexistent. This study contributes groundbreaking knowledge regarding the influence of cultural centers on mattering of underserved students (Schlossberg, 1989).

Through a critical theory epistemology, constructivist grounded theory methodology guided data collection, data analysis, and the emergence of a theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Data collection included focus groups, an interview, and document analysis. Data were hand coded and analyzed through initial, focused, and theoretical coding procedures (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Trustworthiness of the study was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Safeguards were implemented to protect the confidentiality and minimize harm to participants. While incentives for the study existed for participants and the researcher, inquiry results inform future research and practice.

This chapter described the methods for this constructivist grounded theory study. Chapter 4 will report coding results by research questions and propose an emerging theory. Chapter 5 presents a rich discussion of the findings in relation to both the research questions and existing literature. Finally, implications, future research, and conclusions will be included as key elements of Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of this qualitative grounded theory analysis focused on retention (Tinto, 1993), sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002), and mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989) for underserved students in university cross-cultural centers. This chapter commences with a review of the study's purpose, research questions, and methodology. This follows with a description of the study's context and results from document analysis. Focus group and interview results are presented in relation to the research questions. Rich findings unrelated to the research questions are also presented.

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to further understand the retention function of cross-cultural centers by proposing a theory related to the conceptual framework of sense of belonging and mattering. Noted as a source of retention for a rapidly growing underserved student population, cultural centers contribute to narrowing the educational achievement gap (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). This study contributes to the need for a qualitative inquiry on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved university students in university cross-cultural centers.

Informed by a critical theory epistemology, the research questions used to inform this constructivist grounded theory analysis were as follows:

1. In what ways does a cross-cultural center influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?

2. In what ways does a cross-cultural center staff influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
3. How do underserved students relate to mattering and sense of belonging constructs? Are there other constructs that may explain underserved student retention?

## Results Context

### *Setting*

The setting for this study was the Cross-Cultural Center at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). Data collection occurred in late fall 2009 semester and throughout the spring 2010 semester. During the data collection period, a series of hate crimes impacted CSUSM and the neighboring University of California, San Diego (UCSD), campus. In February 2010, a traditional-social fraternity at UCSD hosted a “Compton Cookout party” during Black History Month. Additionally, a noose and Ku Klux Klan (KKK) hoods were found on the UCSD campus (retrieved October 6, 2010, from <http://www.csusm.edu/communications/articles>). On March 3, 2010, a hateful message was found at CSUSM that read “get rid of homos, niggers, towel heads, beaners, and tuition will go down. Tea Party USA 4 Eva.” On the side of the message there appeared to be a graphic depiction of a noose. The following day, March 4, 2010, CSUSM University Police Department reported three additional hate messages (retrieved October 6, 2010, from <http://www.csusm.edu/communications/articles>). On March 9, 2010, students, faculty, and staff participated in a Stop Hate Crime rally and protest organized by students. The rally and protest featured performances, signs, speeches, and

chants that exhibited a clear message from the campus community condemning the hate crimes (retrieved October 6, 2010, from <http://www.csusm.edu/communications/articles>). Following the rally and protest, the president of the university announced a series of workshops and an action plan for campus climate and inclusiveness (retrieved October 6, 2010, from <http://www.csusm.edu/communications/articles>).

The hate crimes exhibited at CSUSM and UCSD may have impacted the results of the study. Researchers connect student sense of belonging to campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Perceived racial tension and hostile campus climate decreases sense of belonging for all racial groups (Hurtado et al.; Locks et al., 2008). The impact of the hate crimes and campus climate on participant interviews will be further explored in Chapter 5.

### *Participants*

Participants for this study included seven undergraduate students and one full-time staff member from CSUSM. Regarding university class standing, three students reported as first-year students, one second-year student, two third-years, and one fifth-year. Three of the students were student staff with titles of Peer Educators for the CSUSM Cross-Cultural Center. Of the eight participants, five reported their gender identity as Male, two as Female, and one as Woman. The ethnic identity of the eight participants was self-reported as Filipino, Asian, Mix, Chilean/Iranian, Mexican American, Filipina, Chicano Mexican-American, and Mixed. Highest parental level of education ranged from Middle School to College. Six of the seven students did not report family income. The two students who reported family income ranged from \$10,000 to

\$33,000. Socioeconomic status was self-reported as follows: 4 - Middle, 1 - Low/Middle, and 2 - Low. Table 4.1 provides a graphic depiction of the participant demographics.

Table 4.1. *Summary of Study Participants*

Participant	Gender Identity	Ethnic Identity	Parental Education	Family Income	Social Economic Status
Student A	Female	Filipino			Middle
Student B	Male	Asian	Some College		Middle
Student C	Male	Mix	High and Middle College		Low
Student D	Male	Chilean Iranian	College		Middle
Student Staff A	Male	Mexican American	High School	\$33,000	Low
Student Staff B	Female	Filipina	College		Middle
Student Staff C	Male	Chicano Mexican American	Middle	\$10,000-12,000	Low/Middle
Staff	Woman	Mixed			

As described in Chapter 3, to enhance the anonymity of the participants, students, and student staff focus group participants were assigned a letter (A-D) and referred to themselves and each other by letter. Assigning a letter to each participant eliminated the need to use participant names. Thus, participant names and pseudonyms will not be used to report the data. Participant social identities are reported for student, student staff, and staff in relation to their selected alphabetical letter. Missing data will be represented with a blank cell.

Demographic information of the participants indicated that the participants resemble the study's definition of underserved students. Bragg and colleagues (2005) defined underserved students as "financially disadvantaged, racial/minorities, and first-

generation individuals who are not represented in colleges and universities in proportion to their representation in the K-12 educational system or in society at large” (p. 6). All participants identified as a racial/minority and most indicated that their highest parental level of education was “less than college.” Participant’s self-reported data on highest parental level of education suggested that most of the participants were first-generation college students. Although more than half of the student participants marked “middle class” for Social Economic Status, most students omitted an answer for Family Income. The highest reported figure for family income was \$33,000. Although the data may suggest that students were “financially disadvantaged,” the lack of reporting makes the social economic status of student participants inconclusive. Participants in this study met the first-generation and racial/minorities criteria in the study’s definition of underserved students (Bragg et al.). However, the lack of reported family income calls for a different method of determining social economic status for future studies.

## Data Analysis

### *Coding*

Utilizing a constructivist grounded theory coding process, this researcher followed the three-step coding process: (a) initial; (b) focused; and (c) theoretical (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). The coding procedures were completed by hand. The initial process involved a line-by-line analysis called in vivo coding. In vivo codes are the actual words or phrases from the participants (Creswell, 2008; Strauss, 1987). The initial/in vivo coding process yielded 977 codes. Of those codes, 543 were from the focus group and interview data and 434 derived from document analysis. Table 4.2 illustrates



examples of the in vivo coding process. Memo writing in the focused coding stage assisted the researcher with condensing the 977 initial codes into 24 categorical codes.

Table 4.2. *In Vivo (Initial) Coding and Examples*

In Vivo/Initial Code	Example
Atmosphere	I stay there until sometimes it closes because, like everybody says, it's the atmosphere.
Staff: Diverse	The staff is very diverse, and that's what I like about them. They're not all the same person.
Resembling Family	Well, everyone in C3 [Cross-Cultural Center] is a really big family and we always help each other with our problems, or if you need help with homework, or if you just need someone to talk to, we're always there for each other.
Involving Students	As a Peer Educator now is to invite residents to be a part of my process in programming and planning, and helping me out.
Knowing Names	Just knowing their name and addressing them by name, I think that makes them feel valued ... but we somehow try to get to know them a little bit more.
Students Promote Belonging	When they [students] feel like they belong, they bring more people to feel like they belong.

Table 4.3 provides examples of initial codes collapsed into categorical codes. The researcher also utilized memo writing to reduce 24 categorical codes into 5 theoretical codes. The five theoretical codes were: (a) community; (b) space; (c) programs; (d) distributed relational leadership; and (e) identity development. The central or core theoretical category in this study was distributed relational leadership.

Table 4.3. *Categorical (Focused) Coding*

Categorical Code	In Vivo (Initial) Code(s)
Extension of Space	Need more space, Crowded, Bigger space means better programs, Lacking chairs
Greetings	Knowing names, Acknowledging every student shows respect, Hugs, Knuckle touches, Modeling greetings by name
Home Away From Home	Atmosphere, Eating, Sleeping, Living room, Home base, Homey
Program Impact	Affecting at least one person, Program planning—opinion valued, Program—learning
Resources	Computer, email, calendar, games, newsletter
Student Ownership	Involving students, Resident: Visits center often, Resident: Give tours of Center, Involving strengths of students, Program involvement promotes ownership

#### *Categorical Code Frequencies*

Categorical code frequency analyses revealed similar results between documents and focus groups/interview data. Three of the top four categorical codes in the focus group and interview analyses were congruent with the four most frequent codes in the document analysis. The three overlapping categorical codes in both analyses included: (a) sense of belonging/retention; (b) space; and (c) programs. *Staff as mentors* was a top-four frequency categorical code for interview and focus groups analysis but not for document analysis. *Social justice* was a top-four frequency categorical code for document analysis but not for interview and focus group analysis. The categorical codes appearing most frequently in the focus groups, interview, and document analysis are displayed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. *Categorical Code Frequencies by Data Collection Method*

Categorical Code	Focus Groups Interview	Document Analysis
Sense of Belonging/Retention	19	7
Space	17	10
Staff as Mentors/Resource	16	0
Programs	16	13
Social Justice	10	7

### *Theoretical Coding*

Similar categorical code frequencies assisted with determining theoretical codes. Saldaña (2009) described theoretical codes as an “umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes and categories” (p. 163). Categorical codes with high frequency in the focus group/interview and the document analysis represent multiple initial and other categorical codes. High-frequency categorical codes in all forms of analysis strengthened the rationale to label those codes as theoretical. High-frequency categorical codes contributed to naming Programs and Space as theoretical codes. Along with frequencies, theoretical codes were determined based on the relationship to the research questions. A detailed explanation of the theoretical codes by research question will be presented later in this chapter.

### Document Analysis

Document analysis served to frame the focus group and interview data and increase the trustworthiness of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Twelve historical and contemporary documents provided additional data for this grounded theory analysis. The

following section discusses evidence from document analysis about two theoretical codes and the emerging central or core category.

### *Programs*

Programs realized the mission of the Center. High frequencies of programs as a code indicate the importance of programming to the educational mission of the Center. Programs were coded in all 12 documents. Historical documents emphasized programming as a means to realizing the mission of Multicultural Programs. The Cross-Cultural Center is part of the Multicultural Programs area. The mission of Multicultural Programs is to “provide intentional learning experiences that educate students about a variety of world views and affirms the diversity of the campus community in its many forms” (Blanshan, 2003, p. 1). This researcher translated “intentional learning experiences” to include programs. Historical documents identify programs as a means to facilitate learning of diversity, culture, and identity. Students attending programs could “celebrate their own culture and learn a variety of world views” (Perez, 2006, p. 1). Programs also served as a pathway to promote multicultural competence (Garibay, 2007). Programs also assisted students with garnering “knowledge, skills, and competencies” to prepare for a global society (Blanshan, p. 1). Programs listed in the historical documents promoted diversity and multiculturalism. Celebration of Culture was described as a program that “celebrates and acknowledges the diverse community that we belong to” (Perez, p. 3). Multicultural Mondays was a program to provide an “opportunity (to) engage, dialogue, and gain exposure to multiculturalism” (Perez, p. 6).

Contemporary documents shifted programmatic student learning outcomes from diversity and multiculturalism to social justice. The 2008-2009 Multicultural Programs Annual Plan reiterates this conceptual change by stating, “I took this position because the concept of multiculturalism on this campus seemed to seek a social justice structure and framework” (Sheikh, 2008a, p. 1). The 2010 Cross-Cultural Center brochure reflects the shift by including social justice in the mission. The brochure states that the Cross-Cultural Center “respect(s) and model(s) the diversity of our region with a context of social justice” (Sheikh, 2010, p. 1). The Social Justice Summit reflects the infusion of social justice in the Center’s mission. The Social Justice Summit was described as a “collaborative initiative to train students in a social justice framework for campus leadership, community engagement, and change activism” (Sheikh, 2009a, p. 1). A response by a student on a programming assessment validated the social-justice learning outcome. Through participation in Cross-Cultural Center programs, the student increased understanding of social justice (Sheikh, 2008b). The programmatic emphasis contributed to social justice forming as a category code. Social justice is a categorical code within the theoretical code of programs. Further explanation of social justice and its relationship to programs will be presented later in this chapter.

Programs were also linked to the mission, values, and strategic priorities of CSUSM. A historical document notes that the university mission statement states, “our University will provide a range of services that respond to the needs of a student body with diverse backgrounds” (Blanshan, 2005, p. 2). The same historical document ties the Multicultural Programs mission to the university mission, “Multicultural Programs ... provides an opportunity for the University to continue working toward its vision by

celebrating and capitalizing on its diversity to form a culturally vibrant learning community” (Blanshan, p. 2). Programs served as one of the services to realize the mission of Multicultural Programs and the university. Historical documents also associated programs to the university values of intellectual engagement and innovation. To realize intellectual engagement, programs “develop leadership and educational skills” (Blanshan, p. 4). Student collaboration on program planning fostered innovation (Perez, 2006). The Social Justice Summit was linked to multiple strategic priorities of the university. The Social Justice Summit met the strategic priorities by “articulat[ing] messages that advocate social justice and educational equity” and “strengthening programming for students, faculty, and staff that promotes a culture open to diversity and equity issues” (Sheikh, 2009a, p. 1). Relating the university mission, values, and strategic plans to the programs contributed to naming programs as a theoretical code.

Document analysis revealed a connection between programs and the theoretical framework and emerging theory of this study. Two documents named sense of belonging, mattering, and retention as outcome goals for the program. The All People’s Celebration formally recognizes faculty, staff, and students for their diversity and social justice contributions to campus (Sheikh, 2009b). Through formal recognition, the All People’s Celebration facilitates sense of belonging and mattering for campus community members (Sheikh, 2009b). The Peer Mentoring Program cited underrepresented student retention as the outcome goal for the program (Sheikh, 2009c).

*Space*

The development of space as a theoretical code was supported by document analysis. Space yielded the second-highest frequency of categorical code appearances in the documents. Documented analysis contributed to the categorical codes of resources—home away from home and safe space being enveloped under the theoretical code of space. Document analysis also linked space with sense of belonging and retention.

Historical and contemporary documents highlight resources for students as a valuable commodity of the space. The earliest document notes the availability of a computer for student use (Blanshan, 2003). Another historical document expands Center resources to include “a multicultural library, computer workstation with internet access” and a “centralized location” to post campus and community events (Perez, 2006). The 2010 Cross-Cultural Center brochure associates home-away-from-home features as resources for students. The brochure highlights the Center as a space to “hang out, do homework, play games, watch our television, meet new people, and build a community” (Sheikh, 2010, p. 2). Furniture commonly associated with home was emphasized as a Center resource by stating, “Check out our comfy red couches!” (Sheikh, p. 2). The safe-space function of the Center served as a venue for “honest and open dialogue with individuals from different backgrounds” (Blanshan, 2005, p. 4). Documents also list a program titled “Safe Space” (Garibay, 2007; Perez, 2006). The documents mention plans to collaborate with a student organization and the LGBTQ Pride Center to initiate the program; however, details regarding description or learning outcomes of the program were not provided. Resources, home-away-from-home, and safe-space qualities of the Center contributed to the designation of “Space” as a theoretical code. Further

connections among resources, home away from home, and safe space with space will be explained later in this chapter.

Congruent with the theoretical framework and emerging theory of this study, the Center space was associated with sense of belonging and retention. Historical documents linked the Multicultural Programs' space with sense of belonging. One document stated that Multicultural Programs was "an intentional space in which diverse students can feel a sense of belonging to campus" (Blanshan, 2005, p. 2). Another document connected sense of belonging and retention by stating, "students who experience a sense of belonging on campus tend to persist toward graduation" (Perez, 2006, p. 1).

Contemporary documents also linked sense of belonging and retention of underserved students to the Cross-Cultural Center. One document professed that underserved students feel "welcome and comfort from the C3 (Cross-Cultural Center)" (Sheikh, 2008a, p. 1). For underserved students, the Cross-Cultural Center "is their space" and a space "for all students to feel they belong" (Sheikh, 2008a, p. 1). The welcoming environment, comfortable space, and sense of belonging experienced with the Center contributed to the retention function of the Center (Sheikh, 2008a). The 2010 Cross-Cultural Center brochure also stated that a service of the Center is to "provide support for underrepresented and marginalized groups and individuals within the larger campus community" (Sheikh, 2010, p. 1).

### *Distributed Relational Leadership*

The antecedents of the core or central code, distributed relational leadership, to this study were noted in the document analysis. Several documents described student



staff job duties and requirements. These documents detailed the program responsibilities of the student staff (Garibay, 2007; Perez, 2006; Sheikh, 2010). Student staff members “develop and implement diversity, multicultural, and social justice programs” (Sheikh, p. 3). As discussed later in this chapter, staff-initiated programs contributed to naming distributed relational leadership as the core or central code for this study. Another document included “assist walk-in customers” and “maintain a warm and professional environment” as student staff job responsibilities (Garibay, p. 14). Assisting walk-in customers may be associated with the categorical code of greetings. Greeting students by name when they entered the Center served as an important distributed relational leadership function. References to the warm environment may also relate to the home-away-from-home and safe-space function of the Center. The relationship of greetings, home away from home, and safe space to distributed relational leadership will be detailed later in this chapter.

### Results by Research Question

This section reports results of this constructivist grounded theory analysis through the research questions. In each research question, corresponding theoretical and categorical codes that emerged from the data will be presented. Participant quotes, document quotes, and in vivo codes will further elucidate the formation of the categorical codes. To further protect the anonymity of the participants, participant quotes will not identify the student by name or pseudonym. Quotes will be identified by type of interview (Focus Group or Interview) and the date of the interview.

*In What Ways Does a Cross-Cultural Center Influence Sense of Belonging and Mattering for Underserved Students?*

The theoretical codes that emerged from the center’s influence on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students were *community* and *space*. Community emerged as a theoretical code from the categorical codes of *dialogue*, *staff as friends*, and *family* (see Figure 4.1). Space developed as a theoretical code from the following categorical codes: *greetings*, *safe space*, *home away from home*, *love*, *resources*, and *extension of space*.

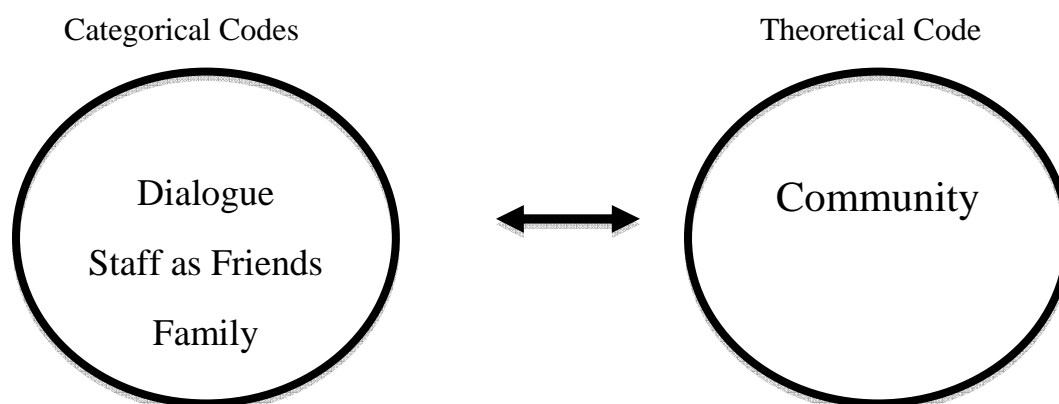


Figure 4.1. *Community Categorical Codes*

*Community*

The formation of community served as a vital mechanism in which the Center influenced sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Document analysis confirmed community as an integral value for the Cross-Cultural Center. Multicultural Programs assist the university in creating a “vibrant learning community” representing the diversity of the local region (Blanshan, 2005, p. 2). The Cross-Cultural Center is “committed to create a community of socially conscious people” (Sheikh, 2010, p. 1).

Focus group and interview data provided additional evidence regarding the value of community in the Cross-Cultural Center.

The importance of community emerged from participants' stories surrounding two events. The first event was the death of a fellow student. One of the students described the community feeling that developed as a result of a friend's death:

When I would step in there after [the student] passed away, everyone in there [Cross-Cultural Center] got together and they weren't sad or mourning anything. They just got real energetic, and they had a bunch of events for him. And the fact that here was a community coming together, just that room, and full of people coming together was a big thing for me (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

The sense of community formed by students who may not have known the deceased student was also evidenced by a student who stated, "I only got to know him a little bit, but being able to participate with everyone else, and making the cranes and to be able to just be a part of all that, it felt really good" (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Another student described how the community helped with the healing process of their friend's death through storytelling and laughter, "everyone just gathered together, and we all just shared stories ... we all just had good laughs over it, just remembering" (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). The data indicated that students in the Cross-Cultural Center formed a community to support each other and to honor their deceased peer.

The other event that participants identified as the impetus for forming community was the occurrence of hate crimes at CSUSM. Students shared how they felt energized and supported by the community reaction to the hate crimes. One student stated, "we really got to see everyone who's ever been in C3 [Cross-Cultural Center] come together" (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Community solidarity transformed into a rally/protest to

condemn the hate crimes. Participating as a member of the community in the rally/protest generated positive and empowering feelings. One student illustrated the power of community action by saying, “seeing everyone getting together to stand up for this, and then for me to be a part of that, too, it felt great” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). A student staff member thought that the community response was “powerful, fun, and promoted a sense of unity” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

Staff members recognized the importance of creating community in the Center. A staff member mentioned that forming a community in the Center was an integral component of the Cross-Cultural Center purpose (Interview, March 25, 2010). A student staff member described the most rewarding aspect of working in the Cross-Cultural Center was to “build a network and community” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Creating community through interpersonal relationships grounded the formation of community as a theoretical code. Analysis of the focus group and interview data revealed that *dialogue*, *staff as friends*, and *family* influenced the formation of community with the Cross-Cultural Center.

### *Dialogue*

Staff, student staff, and students engaged in *dialogue* to create a sense of community. A staff member professed that “having conversations” was one of the ways in which the Center realizes its purpose of supporting students” (Interview, March 25, 2010). Programming served as a venue to provide dialogue for students. Dialogues around race and sexual orientation highlighted the “stories, voices, and histories” of marginalized populations (Interview, March 25, 2010). Students also appreciated the

unstructured dialogue time by being in the Center and, “just talking about stuff going on campus and around schools everywhere” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Dialogue served as a pathway to creating community with students and staff.

Passion for dialogue motivated a staff member to create a program featuring student dialogue, “I feel the most alive and energetic when I am engaging in some kind of dialogue ... so Sala talks [name of the program] is one of the things I look forward to most during the week” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). *Sala* means living room in Tagalog. Tagalog is a common language spoken in the Philippines. Sala talks offered a comfortable, supportive, and welcoming living-room environment for students to dialogue (Student Staff, personal communication, December 24, 2010). Students asked questions, reflected on their opinions, and exchanged dialogue in a safe space (Student Staff, personal communication, December 24, 2010). Living-room and safe-space references also relate to the constructs of home away from home and safe space. Home away from home and safe space will be further discussed later in this chapter. Sala talks contributed to creating a community of egalitarian relationships.

### *Staff as Friends*

The formation of community was also informed by the egalitarian relationships and friendships formed between students and staff. The categorical code *staff as friends* was described by two students, “I don’t even notice they’re staff. To me, they’re another friend” and “the staff, they act like they’re more like your friends than someone who’s supervising you” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Peer egalitarian friendships between students and staff were described by one student, “You see interaction between the peer

educators [student staff] and the non-peer educators ... and it's just like they're on the same level" (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Friendships formed between students and staff members were also described as familial relationships.

### *Family*

The third characteristic for building community was the family-like atmosphere in the Center. The egalitarian relationship between staff and students created familial-type relationships in the Center (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). One student stated,

Everyone in C3 [Cross-Cultural Center] is a real big family and we always help each other with our problems, or if you need help with homework, or if you just need someone to talk to, we're always there for each other (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Staff-student interaction and the Center's atmosphere contributed to the familial feeling of the Center. One student emphasized that the staff was "like everybody else" and "have that atmosphere like family" (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). A student staff member explained that the nurturing nature of the staff promoted a familial environment (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Familial characteristics of the Center were enhanced by the affectionate use of sibling and parental titles. Students often used the Filipino terms *kuya* (big brother), *ate* (big sister), and *ading* (younger sibling) to address and reference each other (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Calling student peers by the Filipino sibling terms transcended the racial identities of students. A Latino student professed that calling peers *kuya*, *ate*, and *ading* contributes to a familial feeling in the Center (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another familial title used for a student staff member had maternal connotations. A

student staff member stated, “I get called ‘mamma’ by some of the” first-year students (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). The familial environment and titles, coupled with dialogue and egalitarian friendships, formed a sense of community for underserved students affiliated with the Cross-Cultural Center.

### *Space*

The second theoretical code regarding the Center’s sense of belonging and mattering influence on underserved students was *space*. The development of sense of belonging and mattering in the Center commenced with greetings and welcomes by staff and student peers. The Center also served as a safe space and a home away from home for students. Within the home-away-from-home environment, students experienced the “love, hugs, and care” of their Center family. Students also utilized the Center as a space to access and learn about campus resources. The commodity and value of the space called for an “extension of the space” beyond the existing four walls. Thus, the six categorical codes enveloped in the theoretical code of Space, include: (a) greetings; (b) safe space; (c) extension of space; (d) home away from home; (e) love; and (f) resources (see Figure 4.2).

### *Greetings*

Upon entering the space, students’ feelings of belonging and mattering were initiated by greetings or welcomes exchanged with staff members and/or student peers. A student described the Center as “a place ... you will feel welcome” (Focus Group, March

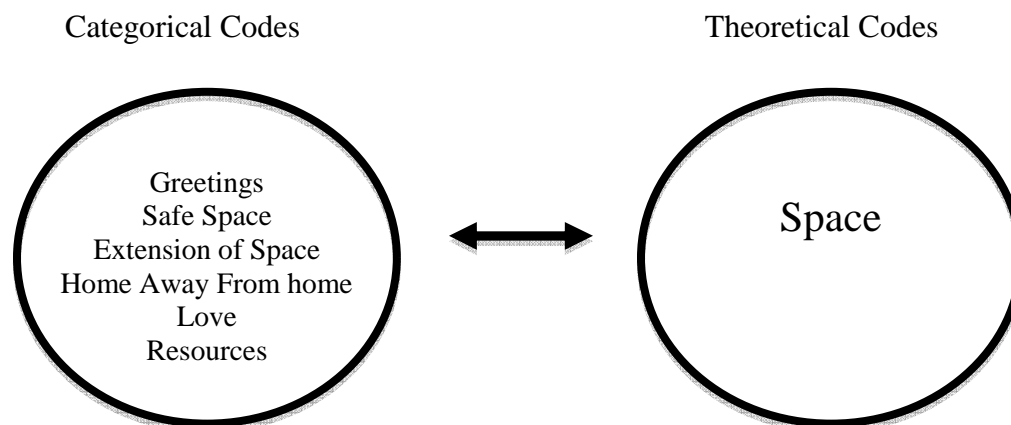


Figure 4.2. *Space Categorical Codes*

4, 2010). One student reported that upon entering the Center, “I always greet everyone. Hugs, high fives, knuckle touches” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Being greeted by name was an important component to feeling welcomed into the space. One student described walking into the Center and being greeted by name:

I’ll walk in and someone knows my name and it’ll be like “Hey, what’s up?” So I feel appreciated. And even if it’s just like a peer educator [student staff] just saying “Hi,” it’s always a good feeling that you know you’re welcome in there (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Greetings by name created “a place ... you feel welcomed” and contributed to feelings of a safe space (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

### *Safe Space*

The safe-space function of the Center promoted sense of belonging and mattering for students. Safe space was the second categorical code contributing to the theoretical code of space. Staff members emphasized the important safe-space function of the Center. One staff member described how the Center, “provide[s] space for students to



feel safe” (Interview, March 25, 2010). Another staff member stated that the staff has “a responsibility to create a safe space” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010) and:

I think that just being a space where minority students and underrepresented students can come and feel comfortable and feel actually celebrated and acknowledged on a campus that is predominately white. I think that’s really important, too, is just being present and being visible and accessible to those students (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

The evidence suggests that staff members viewed their role in creating safe space as an important role in supporting underserved students.

Students recognized the safe-space function of the Center. One student described the Center as a “safe room” while another student believed that the diversity of people in the Center created a welcoming environment (Focus Group, March 4, 2010; Focus Group, December 3, 2009). A diverse staff also contributed to the safe space. Hiring a staff that “relates to different communities” increases the diversity of students utilizing the Center and enhances the Center’s safe-space function (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Moreover, document analysis revealed that diverse individuals in the Center contributed to creation of safe space (Blanshan, 2005). Thus, the data suggested that the presence of staff and students of diverse social identities relates to creation of safe space in the Cross-Cultural Center.

### *Extension of Space*

Conversely, the small size of the Center sometimes made the center feel nonsupportive. A staff member lamented about students who “walk away from the Cross-Cultural Center because there’s not enough physical space” (Interview, March 25, 2010). The lack of space sometimes makes the Center nonsupportive. The staff member

recounted hearing a student say “Oh yeah, I came in and there was no place to sit so I left” (Interview, March 25, 2010). The small physical size and calls for increased space for the Center created the categorical code *extension of space*.

The categorical code of extension of space encapsulated the call for increased space and the strategies students use to externalize and/or expand space. Students and student staff repeatedly expressed the need to increase the size of the Center. Students animatedly described the lack of space, “We’ve run out of space ... you walk in, you just look ... all the seats are taken already. You’re just looking for a place to stand” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). A staff member said, “There’s not enough space for everyone to sit. So there are people standing around. Or sitting on desks. Lying on the floor” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). The call for increased space for the Cross-Cultural Center was “driven” by the students (Interview, March 25, 2010).

When asked about the characteristics of an ideal center, students and staff resoundingly called for increased space. The increased space also meant more visitors and resources in the Center. One student stated that, “the room [would be] twice as big as it is now. I see more people hanging out and peer educators [student staff] getting more personal with you” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Another student said:

In the future ... definitely more space. There are just going to be so many more students, so many more students will ... feel more comfortable coming in because there’s more space. And like Student B was saying, maybe get more tables, some more chairs (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

In addition to increasing comfort, expanding the Cross-Cultural Center may help the university with realizing diversity and social justice outcomes.

Students and staff members connected the need for more space with the role and impact of the Cross-Cultural Center to the university. The small physical size of the Cross-Cultural Center challenged the ability of the staff to contribute to the realization of the university's diversity and social justice mission. A student staff member professed that the small space of the Center was incongruent with a university mission statement that promoted social justice and diversity (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

Students and staff implemented creative strategies to expand the space. A staff member described how the Center space expands outside, "students will just go outside and create the space outside" (Interview, March 25, 2010). Another student stated, "once the C3 (Cross-Cultural Center) fills up, the benches outside start filling up" (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). A staff member thought that the outside space served a specific function, "sometimes I feel like people step outside because they actually want to have a more private conversation" (Interview, March 25, 2010). Using the external space for private conversation reflected the need to expand the Cross-Cultural Center.

Staff members strategically expanded the Center space to different campus locations through programs. Signage assisted with expanding the Center space to the location of a program. Rather than closing the Center, the staff would place a sign on the door that said "Please join us here at this program, during this time period" (Interview, March 25, 2010). As the staff member noted, "the language that we're using is not to turn people away, it's to divert them, it's to move the space (Interview, March 25, 2010). The staff re-created the safe space environment in the program location by welcoming and greeting students as they would in the Center (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Staff members also extended the space and promoted community responsibility by checking on students outside the Center. If students outside the Center seemed distraught or stressed, staff members would approach or ask another student to check-in with the student outside (Interview, March 25, 2010). Concern and care exhibited by staff and students created a home-away-from-home environment in the Center.

### *Home Away From Home*

The Cross-Cultural Center served as a home away from home for students. Students associated their behaviors in the Center as congruous with their residential home activity. One student stated, “Definitely the Cross-Cultural Center is a home away from home because I do my homework there, I sleep there, I eat there, which is pretty much what I do at home” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Students indicated that they spent their external classroom time in the Cross-Cultural Center. One student stated, “If I’m not in class, I’m there [Cross-Cultural Center]. It’s just because all my friends are there, and it’s a nice environment. I just relax there, like I relax at home” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Students also associated family with the home-away-from-home function of the Center. One student stated “The Cross-Cultural Center is my home away from home ... we’re like a family, so you just get that comfort from everybody” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009).

The home-away-from-home function supported the sense of belonging role of cultural centers. A staff member confirmed student sentiments regarding the Center’s home-away-from-home function, stating, “We are a space that feels like home. Feels like they [students] are included somewhere on campus” (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Feelings of inclusion parallel the constructs of sense of belonging and mattering.

Moreover, feelings of inclusion and home away from home realize the sense of belonging vision noted in historical documents (Blanshan, 2005).

### *Love*

The Cross-Cultural Center space was also linked to love. When asked to describe their feelings as they walk in the Center, the students emphasized love, hugs, and care. One student stated, “My feelings in the Cross-Cultural Center is love. All of those people care about you, no matter what” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Another student described the Center as one of “happiness and love” while another student stated, “I walk in and ... get a sense of welcoming and very loving people. You know, they have their own little family” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Finally, another student equated the Center with a hug, “We always say that you’re always welcome to come here and bring your friends, and the Center is just holding their arms open for a big hug” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009).

### *Resources*

In addition to love, the Center is a space that offers resources for students. Students appreciated the resources provided by the Cross-Cultural Center. Students checked email, utilized the computers, relaxed on the couches, and garnered friendships (Focus group, December 3, 2009). Center resources also included a newsletter, multicultural library, and a program calendar (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Student use of the Center’s resources realized services noted in historical documents. As noted

earlier in this chapter, document analysis revealed that the Center space would offer resources such as a library and computer (Blanshan, 2003; Perez, 2006). Document analysis also described the Center as a hub of information for further campus and community involvement (Perez).

Focus group and interview data supported the Center's role in serving as an outlet for further involvement. A staff member stated, "Getting involved in the Cross-Cultural Center ... made me aware of the social issues on campus ... I started to get involved in student orgs [organizations], being part of committees, and trying to get others involved on campus." Another staff member described how a student's involvement in the Center led to involvement with student government, the Women's Center, and student organizations (Interview, March 25, 2010).

The Cross-Cultural Center influenced underserved students' sense of belonging and mattering through sense of community and space. Community was built through dialogue and the formation of friendships and familial-type relationships. The Center served as a safe space or home away from home for many underserved students. The comfortable space was enhanced through feelings of love, resources, and the need to expand the space. The triangulation of data increases the trustworthiness that community and space served as integral Center factors for facilitating sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Center staff influences on the sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students are further reported in the next section.

*In What Ways Does a Cross-Cultural Center Staff Influence Sense of Belonging and Mattering for Underserved Students?*

For the second research question, the theoretical codes that emerged from the staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students were *programs* and *distributed relational leadership*. Programs crystallized as a theoretical code from the categorical codes of *social justice*, *program impact*, and *student ownership* (see Figure 4.3). Distributed relational leadership developed as a theoretical code from the categorical codes *greetings*, *staff care*, *staff as friends*, *staff as mentors*, and *student ownership*. Distributed relational leadership was the core or centralized phenomenon for this study. Document analysis also contributed to naming programs as a theoretical code and distributed relational leadership as the core or central phenomenon of this study.

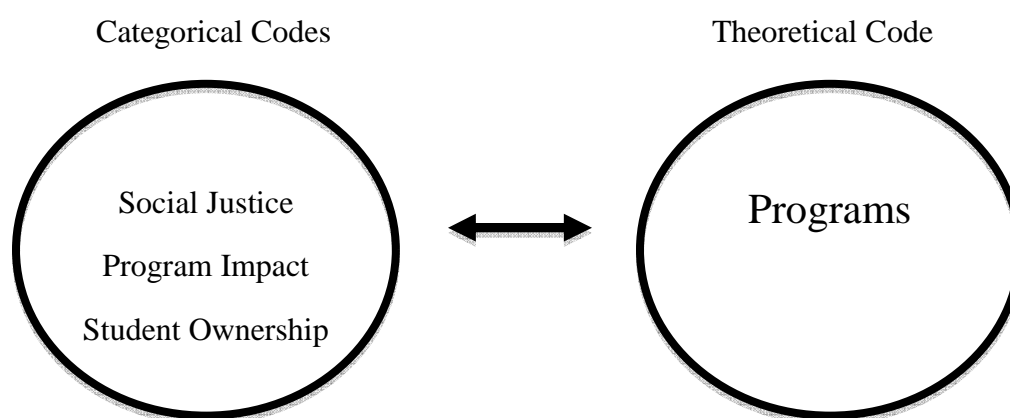


Figure 4.3. *Programs' Categorical Codes*

### *Programs*

Programs provided structured activities, encouraged dialogue and education, and raised awareness of social justice issues—all important means for staff to influence sense of belonging and mattering. Programs impacted students in a variety of ways. Programs enhanced sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students involved in the Center. Programs also facilitated increased student ownership in the Center.

Social justice emerged as a categorical code within programs. When asked about the purpose of the Cross-Cultural Center, staff members mentioned social justice. Student staff and staff participants reiterated social justice learning as an outcome goal for programs. Student staff named programming as an important vehicle to support the Center's purpose of "promot[ing] cultural awareness and social justice issues" (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Programming was an important mechanism to realize the Center's purpose of supporting students (Interview, March 25, 2010). Programming enhanced students' education and clarified understanding of "difference, diversity, social justice, and oppression" (Interview, March 25, 2010). The Social Justice Summit was a program that realized the social justice learning outcomes of the Center. Social Justice Summit student participants garnered knowledge and impactful experiences. One Summit program participant was inspired to create a new student organization grounded in social justice principles (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Focus group and interview data supported document analysis results regarding the multicultural and social justice purpose of programming. Multicultural and social justice student learning outcome goals were clearly stated in the documents. As noted in the document analysis section, a programmatic shift from diversity and multiculturalism to social justice occurred in programming. The triangulation of data increased the credibility regarding the multicultural and social justice learning outcome goals for programming.

### *Program Impact*

Programs had a variety of outcomes and impact on students. Programs served as a mechanism for students to feel valued, appreciated, and recognized. Thus, *program*



*impact* emerged as a categorical code within programs. One student shared appreciation for the staff members' role in programming:

Every week we have Sala talks, which is pretty much us discussing social justice or injustice issues that are going on in our community and our world. The staff members always encourage everyone to speak their opinion. It's really nice to know that your opinion counts (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Programs reinforced the value of expressing opinions and learning about social issues (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Staff members also felt appreciation from programs. A student staff member felt appreciated by the "big turnout" and the "fun and excitement" created by the program (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). A staff member felt appreciated by a student who created a student organization because of participation in the Social Justice Summit program. Programs also allowed staff to show appreciation of students involved with the Center. The All People's Celebration was a program that students, faculty, and staff were recognized for their "social justice, diversity, and inclusion" work both in the Center and on campus (Interview, March 25, 2010).

### *Student Ownership*

Involving students in program planning and implementation created the categorical code *student ownership*. Staff members intentionally assessed student interests and then created programs to meet student needs (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). In addition, staff members infused student talent to involve them in programming. One student staff member encouraged student artists to utilize their strengths by participating in an art and activism program (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

Another student staff member reflected on the process of reciprocating student ownership in programming (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Student ownership in programming served as the vehicle for this student to become a Center regular and then a student staff member. This student staff member was empowered by student staff members who involved her as a student. The student staff member stated, “I had a voice, and I had some kind of power in that I could contribute to what was being planned” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Thus, as a student staff member, she reciprocated student involvement and ownership in programming. The student staff member “made it a point” to “invite residents to be a part of [her] process in programming and planning” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

The reciprocation of student ownership in programs materialized with student participants in this study. A student echoed positive feelings associated with being involved with Center program planning:

Whenever we do Sala talks, the staff member who actually came up with the idea does come to me and throw in the topics we might be talking about. And it feels good, because I actually get to help out not only when Sala talks is going on, but before, and it makes me really feel like a part of it (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Involving students in programming promoted “student ownership” in the programs (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Staff members also utilized the strengths of other staff members to promote ownership and success with programs (Interview, March 25, 2010). Thus, staff strategies to involve students built a strong sense of student ownership with programming.

Involving students in programming was also reflected in the document analysis. Historical documents connected the university value of innovation with student

collaboration in programs (Blanshan, 2005). Another document mentioned the creation of a volunteer program to assist the Center with programming (Sheikh, 2008a). Student involvement and collaboration with programs strengthened student ownership. The staff's ability to create student ownership in programming emanated from their distributed relational leadership.

### *Distributed Relational Leadership*

The central or core theoretical code for this study was *distributed relational leadership*. The Center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering was exhibited by the relationships and interactions among students, student staff, and staff. Relationships and interaction commenced with staff members greeting students by name. Relationships also grew with staff member concern and care for students. Staff member relationships with students engendered friendship and mentorship. Through staff-member distributed relational leadership strategies, staff members also promoted student ownership in the Center. Thus, the categorical codes that produced distributed relational leadership as the core or central phenomenon included: (a) greetings; (b) staff as friends; (c) staff as mentors; (d) staff care; and (e) student ownership (see Figure 4.4).

### *Greetings*

Greeting students by name as they entered the Center influenced sense of belonging and mattering for students. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, student staff job descriptions showed the antecedents of greeting students (Garibay, 2007). Greetings served as a duplicate code for both the categorical codes of space and greetings. Similar

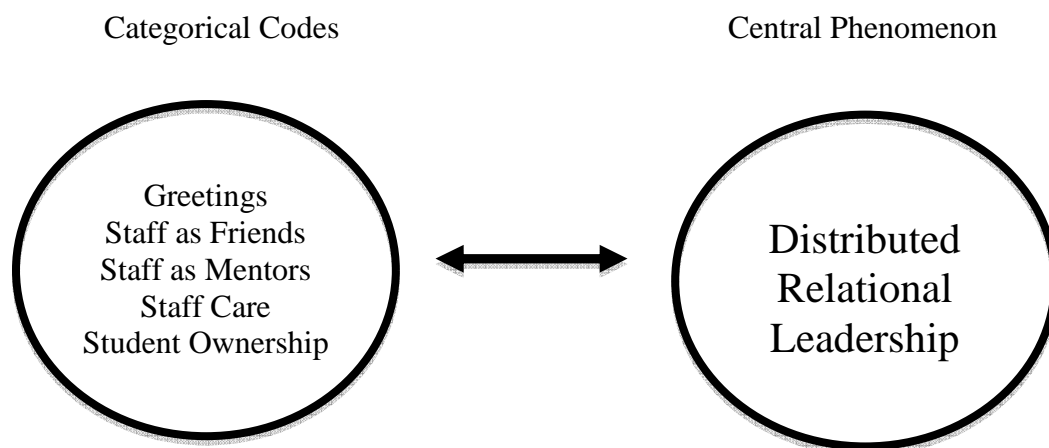


Figure 4.4. *Distributed Relational Leadership Categorical Codes*

to creating a safe space and home away from home, greetings by name created relationships of value and worth. A staff member described how greeting students by name exhibited distributed relational leadership, “having that same practice of always acknowledging folks who come in [to the Center] builds relationships. After that once we talk and dialogue and whatnot, then it basically feels homey, like a safe space” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Another staff member linked greeting students by name with showing attention to students:

I try to say hello or goodbye by name as students walk in or out of the Cross-Cultural Center. Sometimes it takes me a while. But it is a goal of mine that I can say hello with someone's name every time they walk in and out. So that also starts to become a pattern for other folks. But I feel like that's a way that I show attention (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Another staff member was proud not to wear the staff nametag. Distributed relational leadership spurned the necessity to wear the name tag since students knew the staff member’s name and formed a friend or mentor relationship with the staff member (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

### *Staff as Friends*

Staff-member distributed relational leadership formed friendships between the staff and students. The egalitarian nature of the student staff created friendships with the students. One student explained:

The staff in C3 [Cross-Cultural Center], there's not like a huge gap between the differences, the people who hang out in the C3 and the people who work at C3, so it's like you're on the same level, and build a lot of friendships (Focus Group, December 3, 2009).

Another student said, "I don't notice that they're staff. To me, they're another friend" (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). The staff name tag reminded a student about the staff member's role, "Usually, the only time I realize that they're staff is if I notice the nametag. Other than that, they're friends" (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Staff and student friendships also formed through frequent interaction, attendance at student organization events, and similar interests and passions (Focus Group, December 3, 2009).

Relational leadership includes ethics as an important component to the model (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). The data did not reveal any ethical issues regarding student staff member friendships with students. Further discussion regarding ethics and distributed relational leadership will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### *Staff as Mentors*

Staff distributed relational leadership formed mentorship for students and staff. Students recognized staff as mentors "since they are older than us they're sort of our mentors" and "like mentoring ... someone you can look up to" (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Staff served as mentors by referrals and encouragement of cocurricular

involvement. Staff and students named the role of staff in promoting involvement with student organizations (Focus Group, December 3, 2009; Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

One staff member noted that as an educator, the staff provided resources for student involvement in organizations. Staff mentoring roles also resembled teachers and idol/hero status. One student said, “I treat [the staff member], like my teacher ... [the staff member] knows how to handle a situation and what advice to give” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another student described the idol/hero status of a staff member:

Because of [the staff member], I’ve been wanting to get more and more involved with social issues. Every time I go into C3 [Cross-Cultural Center], I’m always happy if [the staff member] is working, or if [the staff member] is in there, because I always like to talk to [the staff member] about different things and get [the staff member’s] opinion. [The staff member] is basically like my one soul ... my idol, my hero (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Staff friendship, mentorship, and hero status translated into care and concern for the students.

### *Staff Care*

Staff distributed relational leadership was exhibited through care and concern for the students. Staff care as a categorical code was displayed by showing concern for the students and students’ families, valuing student opinions, assisting students with cocurricular responsibilities, and using technology to check on students.

Staff care was exhibited by staff attention and notice of students’ conditions and well-being. A student recognized that Center staff members noticed his external appearance and internal condition. Staff attention to the well-being of students was described by this quote:

Every person that works in the C3 [Cross-Cultural Center] seems to notice if you are not looking or feeling good. They always ask you how you're doing, not just hi, and then they go back to work. So I think everybody who works in C3 has at some point asked me how I'm doing or has at least wondered how I feel about certain things (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

This quote reflects the next step to greeting students by name. After greeting students by name, the staff member shows care by inquiring into students' lives and conditions.

A student and student staff member portrayed staff care through student staff concern for the student's family. A student described the staff care exhibited through concern for his family's health and well-being after a natural disaster. The student quoted:

After the earthquakes in Chile, almost immediately people started asking me if my family was OK. And one of the staff members was contacting me to see how I was doing, to see whether or not I had heard from my family (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

A staff member corroborated the evidence of staff care for the student's family members.

The staff member quoted:

When I discovered that there was an earthquake in Chile, I knew that one of our residents [students] was half Chilean and had family there. So, I immediately texted [the student] to ask if everything was OK ... and, I just kept up that kind of relationship ... I made a mental note ... to talk to [the student] and just be there as somebody just supporting [the student] in that moment knowing that it was really hard thing to be going through (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

This quote reflects the progression of staff care from greetings to concern about family members of students. Staff members show care for students by greeting them by name, inquiring about their personal health and well-being, and then exhibiting concern for family members of students. The progression of staff care is an example of Center staff distributed relational leadership.

Staff care was also shown by valuing student opinion, “Peer educators [staff members] really care about your opinion on certain issues, so they’re always open ears, and they never judge what you say or anything. And they always take your opinion into consideration” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another student appreciated a staff member’s assistance with helping write a monologue for a cocurricular event, “One of the peer educators [staff members] sa[id] ‘I’ll help you write this’ [and] that really mean[t] a lot” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

A staff member utilized technology and social media to exhibit staff care.

Utilizing a popular form of communication with students, one staff member frequently uses Facebook to exhibit care and concern for students. The staff member said:

I have a Facebook page and it’s mostly for students. So, if I haven’t seen someone in a while saying, “Oh I miss you” or “you weren’t here today. What’s going on?” Just showing people that I’m noticing when they’re here or when they’re not here (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Utilizing Facebook exhibits distributional relational leadership. The staff member shows care for the student by using a student-preferred communication mode.

### *Student Ownership*

Staff care and concern for students promoted student ownership within the Center. Similar to the categorical code, programs, student ownership was a categorical code for distributed relational leadership. Relationships between staff and students produced student ownership in the Center and created the phenomenon of *residents*. Staff members mentioned that residents frequently visit the Center. A staff member described the relationship, student ownership, and resident development process:



One of most rewarding things is ... seeing the relationship develop and then becoming like what we call a resident of C3 [Cross-Cultural Center] or a regular. I just really like knowing that the Cross-Cultural Center has become a space where people feel comfortable and safe and like they have some type of ownership in a sense and that belonging (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

When asked to describe a “resident,” staff members associated residents with an ownership level in the Center that allowed residents to perform staff responsibilities. Staff members also intentionally promote resident development by asking students to provide tours or watch the Center (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). A staff member described the phenomenon of a student resident performing staff responsibilities in the Center by stating:

There are some [residents or regulars] that have taken it upon themselves to have a very good sense of what C3 is, so much so that they could be the ones giving tours ... Often times I’ll be about to get up, and a student will have already greeted, and started to give somebody a tour of the Cross-Cultural Center. So in a sense they have become peer educators, or members of our staff in that sense that they can step in and out of those roles. We also feel really comfortable leaving the space for meetings, or events and stuff. And leaving somebody to oversee, supervi[se] [the center] (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

Residents and student ownership was an integral component for staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Providing the trust and training to develop student residents to perform staff responsibilities exhibited distributed relational leadership.

Document analysis supported the development of student ownership and Center residents. The need for a volunteer program in the Cross-Cultural Center honors the “personal development of students and recognition of student’s commitment to the C3 [Cross-Cultural Center]” (Sheikh, 2008a, p. 7). Student ownership was further reflected

in the volunteers being groomed to “run the center, welcome students, answer questions, and direct resources” (Sheikh, p. 7). The term *volunteer* was not found in the focus group and interview data. Thus, the volunteer program may be the official organizational structure to the informal development of Center residents. The collaborative and intentional process of empowering students to become Center residents exhibits staff distributed relational leadership.

Distributed relational leadership was the core or central code for this grounded theory study because of the staff influence on student sense of belonging and mattering. The collaborative and intentional staff process of creating meaningful relationships shows distributed relational leadership. By building friendships, mentorships, and showing care for students, staff members exuded distributed relational leadership. Distributed relational leadership also connected the existing categorical codes. Through distributed relational leadership, the staff created a community and space associated with the Center that promoted sense of belonging and mattering. Distributed relational leadership also produced programs that fostered student ownership and involvement. Distributed relational leadership also influenced the academic, career, and activism identity development of underserved students. Further information about the staff influence on underserved identity development will be explained later in this chapter.

*How Do Underserved Students Relate to Mattering and Sense of Belonging Constructs*

*Are There Other Constructs That May Explain Underserved Student Retention?*

For the third research question, categorical codes emerged to explain the relationship of mattering and sense of belonging with underserved students. *Sense of*

*belonging/retention* garnered the highest frequency (19) of codes amongst the categorical codes (see Table 4.4). *Greetings* and *staff care* resemble constructs of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). *Challenge and support* also emerged as another construct that may explain underserved student retention.

### *Sense of Belonging/Retention*

Students and staff repeated the sense of belonging/retention function of the Cross-Cultural Center. When asked how they would describe the Cross-Cultural Center to a prospective student, one student answered:

I can define the Cross-Cultural Center as a place where you can feel accepted, and you can feel like you belong, because everyone there is always open to meeting new people, and learning about them, and how they think about things. It's just really nice to find a place where you feel like you belong (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

A student staff member attributed her sense of belonging to the Center to the presence of another staff member. The student staff member stated, “[The student staff member] has this amazing, friendly, warm aura ... as a student, I felt immediately welcomed, like I belonged and I was totally celebrated and supported, because [the student staff member] was there” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). As a transfer, commuter student, a student staff member empathized with students who did not feel a sense of belonging until coming to the Cross-Cultural Center (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

The Center and Center staff contributed to the successful transition of underserved students. When asked about the Cross-Cultural Center's influence on their transition to the campus, students attributed the Center to helping them meet new people

and decrease feelings of being “alone” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). One student talked about the transition from spending time outside classrooms to the Cross-Cultural Center. During the first week of school, the student did not have a positive experience with the university. The student said, “I would go to where my classroom would be and sit right outside the door and wait” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). After interacting with peers and the staff in the Cross-Cultural Center, the institutional experience of the student improved. The student stated,

Once I started going into C3 [Cross-Cultural Center], started hanging out there, it felt good. I kind of like going to school, it didn't feel like such a drag to have to go to class. And the staff ... they're more like your friends really than someone who's like just supervising you (Focus Group, December 3, 2009).

This quote supports the Center space and staff influence on underserved student sense of belonging. Contributing to the successful transition of first-year students also promotes retention of underserved students.

Student staff members reported that the Cross-Cultural Center “plays a huge role in the retention of lots of students of color and other underrepresented students” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). A student shared the Cross-Cultural Center’s retention function by stating:

[The Cross-Cultural Center] saved me from moving back home. Because the first year is very hard to get through. But when you have people, like the people in C3, to help you, to guide you, then you don't want to leave (March 4, 2010).

This quote indicates that students associated retention to the Cross-Cultural Center.

Moreover, students connected sense of belonging to the Cross-Cultural Center. Similar to sense of belonging and retention, students also related to mattering constructs.

### *Mattering*

The categorical codes of greetings and staff care relate to Schlossberg's (1989) constructs of mattering. Student and staff statements coded in greetings related to the mattering construct *attention*. Attention was defined as "the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person" (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). By greeting students by name as they walk in the center, staff members were showing attention to the students. A staff member said, "It is a goal of mine that I can say hello with someone's name and say it every time they walk in and out ... that's the way that I show attention" (Interview, March 25, 2010).

The categorical code staff care appears to resemble the mattering construct *importance*. Importance is "To believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do or is concerned with our fate" (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). Student staff members concern for a student's family in the Chile earthquake, care for student opinions, and utilizing Facebook were examples of how staff care resembles importance (Focus Group, December 3, 2009; Focus Group, March 17, 2010; Interview, March 25, 2010). One student's quote connects staff care to importance:

When you walk in and have a sad look on your face, the peer educators [student staff] there ask you, what's up, what's wrong, do you need to talk, we're always here for you. And just on a regular basis, if you're sitting alone, they'll [student staff] talk to you like, hey, hello, how are you, how was your weekend? They're very interested to hear what you have to say (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Along with mattering and sense of belonging, the construct of challenge, support, and readiness emerged as another means to explain underserved student retention.

### *Challenge, Support, and Readiness*

The categorical code *challenge, support, and readiness* relates to the seminal student development theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). Sanford suggested that a balance of challenge and support was needed to facilitate student development. An abundance of challenge or support may produce negative results and/or apathy. Sanford also introduced readiness. Sanford argued that students are not able to exhibit behaviors until they are psychologically or physically ready.

Staff members in this study shared examples of behaviors that match Sanford's challenge, support, and readiness theory. One staff member described another staff member's ability to challenge and support one's perspective and opinion, "[The staff member] has this awesome way of questioning people ... playing the devil's advocate and pushing people in a way that's safe and not aggressive" (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Another staff member described the use of challenge and support, "For me, it's not just support, support, support. Part of supporting is challenging ... whether it's having difficult conversations [and/or showing that] their actions, behaviors, thoughts, assumptions impact other people" (Interview, March 25, 2010). This staff member also described the use of readiness by applying levels of challenge and support based "on where they're starting from" (Interview, March 25, 2010). The staff member provided an example of applying challenge, support, and readiness with a student:

I'm challenging [the student] to do some things that are different, to find the more appropriate time, place, and manner for things. The student just needed some coaching ... some support ... I feel like now [the student] really has turned into a leader (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Challenge, support, and readiness may serve as another construct to explain underserved student retention. The next section describes findings external to the framework of the research questions.

### *Rich Points*

#### *Identity Development*

The fifth theoretical code to emerge from the data was *identity development*. Identity development emerged as a theoretical code outside the framework of the research questions. Thus, identity development was considered a rich finding. The categorical codes that supported identity development as a theoretical code were *activism*, *academic*, and *career* (see Figure 4.5).

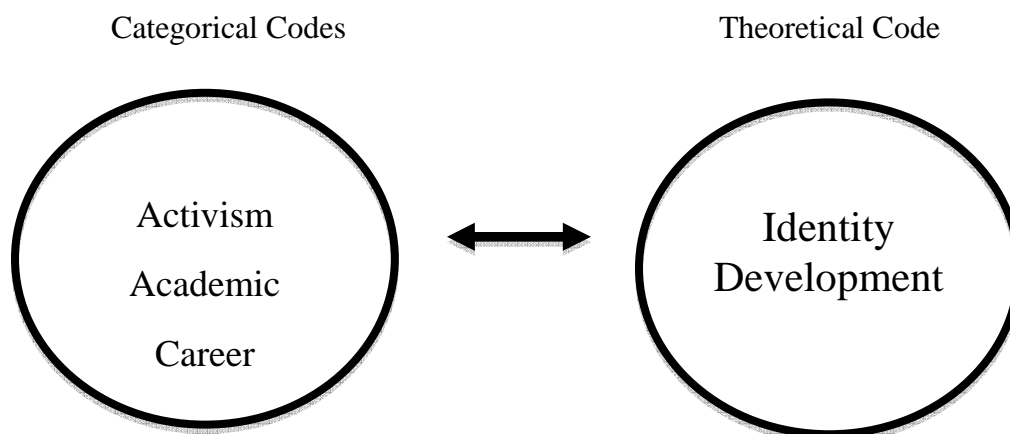


Figure 4.5. *Identity Development Categorical Codes*

Documented analysis supported identity development as a theoretical code. Historical documents include identity development in the Multicultural Programs vision statement. The vision statement attributes “intentional learning experiences” (programs) as a mechanism to “supporting students in their various stages of their own identity development” (Blanshan, 2005, p. 1; Garibay, 2007, p. 2; Perez, 2006, p. 1). The 2010

Cross-Cultural Center brochure also associates programs with identity development. Document analysis triangulated with focus group and interview data to increase the credibility of identity development as a theoretical code.

Focus group and interview data indicated that the Cross-Cultural Center and its staff fostered the identity development of students and student staff. When asked about the impact of the Center and its staff to students, one student answered, “figuring out my identity. You don’t have to have a certain identity, in the Cross-Cultural Center, but it shows that you can go out, and figure out who you are in the real world” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another student stated that the Center “is that place where you can collect yourself, identify yourself, and figure out your path in life” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another student noted that the Center and its staff “helped me realize more of a school identity” (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). One student attributed identity development to the Center staff, “You kind of get your own identity in college. With the help of the staff, they pushed me along in that direction to where I am now” (Focus Group, December 3, 2010).

Staff members shared strategies and application of promoting identity development with students. The Center staff supported underserved student identity development through programming focused on race, sexual orientation, and “other aspects of identity” (Interview, March 25, 2010). Another staff member acknowledged the staff role as “an educator” and to “help people find themselves” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). The role of being a student staff member (peer educator) impacted identity development. One student staff member shared the identity development impact of another staff member. Referring to the staff member, this person was credited for



“empowering me to keep coming back [to the Center] and explore more of myself, my role and my potential role as a peer educator” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

Serving as a student staff member supported many facets of identity development. Experiences as a student staff member influenced their identities as an activist, community member, and parent. Being a student staff member also impacted their academic and career identity (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). One student staff member stated that the staff experience influenced “every single aspect of [her] life” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). A student staff member attributes a Cross-Cultural Center program—Social Justice Summit—as the catalyst to serving as a student staff member and community activist (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). The student staff experience assisted with applying theory to practice. One student staff member applied literature and ethnic studies theories to facilitate a Cross-Cultural Center program (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). The student staff experience influenced a staff member’s child-rearing practices. Being a student staff member impacted “the way [she] raise[s] [her] son and ... how [she] teaches him from a social justice perspective” (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). The student staff experience reflected the three categorical codes supporting identity development as a theoretical code. Being a staff member furthered the activism, academic, and career identity of students and student staff.

### *Activism*

Students developed their activism identity through involvement in the Cross-Cultural Center. A staff member described the staff role in promoting students’ activism identity:

I would hope that we all empower folks in different ways to either speak their minds at home or in the classroom or to be more confident in where they're going with their lives because college is a place where you're supposed to figure all that out and find who you are (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

This quote reflects the development of activism in multiple aspects of students' lives.

However, reactions to campus hate crimes generated the most influence on student activism identity development.

Center staff development of activism was realized by student participation in two campus rallies/protests. When answering a question regarding the most alive or energetic moment associated with the Cross-Cultural Center, two students mentioned participating in a rally to fight hate crimes (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). One student stated, "Seeing everybody get together and stand up for us, stand up for what we believe in, who we are. It brought everybody together" (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Another student attributed "finding my voice" as a result of student staff members' involvement in a rally/protest (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Staff members expressed that their proudest moment associated with the Cross-Cultural Center was participating in the rallies/protests with the students (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). One staff member said, "it was like a mother watching my children grow up ... it was so great and warm" (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the hate crimes at CSUSM may have influenced the results of this study. Student reaction to the hate crimes seemed to impact the focus group participants. The formation of an activist identity may have been moderated by student participation in the rallies/protests to condemn the hate crimes. Nonetheless, focus group

and interview data support activist identity as a categorical code for identity development.

### *Academic*

The Center and Center staff impacted academic identity through major choice and academic support. There was a progression of influence on academic major. A first-year student was inspired by experiences in the Center and by a Center staff member to switch majors from business to sociology. The student and a student staff member corroborated on the student's academic identity development. The student stated:

Being in C3 [Cross-Cultural Center], going to the events, going to some of the staff members who are involved in different programs and events and dealing with identifying social issues has been a guiding light to me. That's why I know ... I would like to get into sociology ... So definitely the Cross Cultural Center has given me a purpose (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

Another staff member said that the “most dramatic impact” the staff has on students was the influence on students' academic majors (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Other students also attributed academic major and minor choices to their involvement with the Cross-Cultural Center and its staff (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). One student credited a student staff member for declaring a literature and writing major, “I was undeclared when I first came here. And then one of the staff was a lit[erature] writing major, and I got really passionate about reading, and I became a lit[erature] writing major after that” (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Students also found academic support and tutoring with peers of similar majors (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

### *Career*

The Cross-Cultural Center and Center staff impacted employment and career identity development for underserved students. Regarding employment, two students utilized the Center as a job referral source and one obtained part-time employment through a friend in the Center (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). A career progression existed with the students and student staff. All the first-year and second-year students aspired to work at the Cross-Cultural Center as student staff members (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). Two student staff members expressed interest in student affairs as a career. One student staff member entertained a faculty and student affairs career:

Since I thought I wanted to be a professor, and I still want to do that, but just having an opportunity to meet administration, and get to understand their jobs and what they're for, and how they served students, I am just really interested in that process (Focus Group, March 4, 2010).

A staff member utilized the challenge, support, and readiness theory to develop the student staff member's higher education career aspirations (Interview, March 25, 2010). Thus, there appeared to be a career progression in which students aspire to student staff positions, student staff members aspire to faculty and staff positions, and the staff develops student staff to realize their higher education career goals.

Document analysis supported the phenomenon of staff fostering the career identity development of student staff. Student staff members were expected to reflect and relate their leadership experiences to their career aspirations (Garibay, 2007). The staff member supported student staff with identifying strengths and areas of growth to assist with career planning (Garibay). As mentioned earlier, document analysis also supported

the identity development of underserved students. Interview, focus group, and document analysis data added credibility to identity development being a rich finding for this study.

### Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership and Retention

Implementing a constructivist grounded theory methodology, a theory emerged that reflected student experiences with the Cross-Cultural Center. Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the “phenomenon of the study” and recognizes that data and analysis are constructed by the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the grounded theory that emerged from this study reflects the experiences of the participants and the researcher. As discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher’s attention to the trustworthiness of the results adds credibility to this study’s grounded theory.

The constructivist grounded theory that emerged from this study’s data is called *Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Leadership and Retention*. Figure 4.6 provides a visual image of the grounded theory. The theory is anchored by the central or core phenomenon of this study—distributed relational leadership. The intentional and collaborative leadership of the staff created meaningful relationships between students and staff. These relationships connected all other categories in this study. The other four theoretical codes may be attributed to staff distributed relational leadership. Distributed relational leadership influenced every outcome of the Center. The positive outcomes associated with the community, space, programs, and identity development resulted from distributed relational leadership.

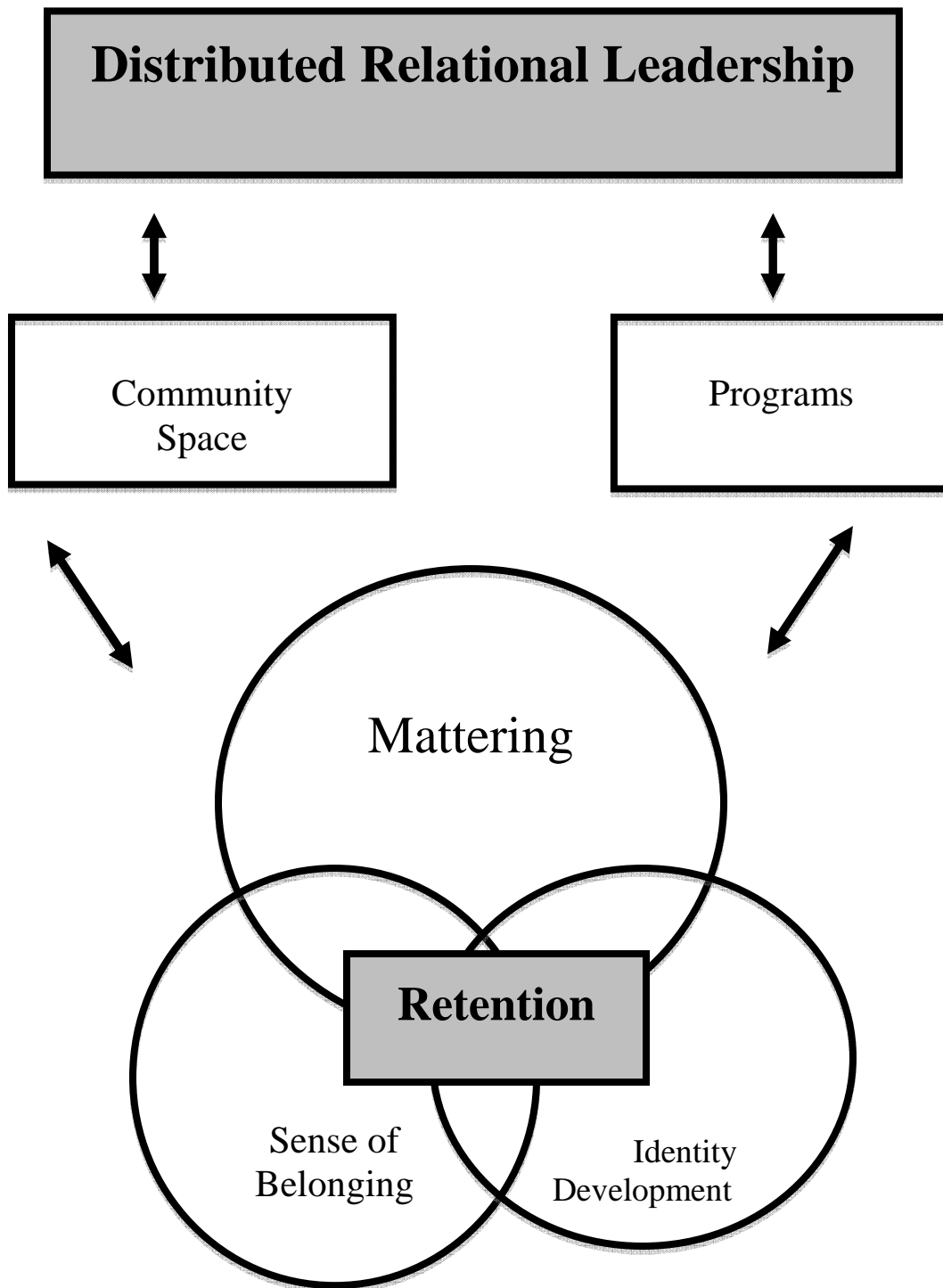


Figure 4.6. *Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership and Retention*

Distributed relational leadership is visually represented with a large rectangular box on the top of the model. Bidirectional arrows to community, space, and programs recognize the collaborative and egalitarian influence of students contributing to the Center's distributed relational leadership. The bidirectional arrows also represent the community, space, and programs influence on distributed relational leadership. In other words, the interactions between students and staff in the community, space, and programs impact the operationalization of distributed relational leadership.

Distributed relational leadership influences the community and space of the Center. The familial and friendship relationships associated with the community evolved from the collaboration between students and staff. The resources, safe-space, and home-away-from-home functions of the Space was also influenced by distributed relational leadership. Thus, the categorical codes associated with the Center—community and space—directly connect to distributed relational leadership with a bidirectional arrow. The rectangular box representing community and space also directly connects to this study's theoretical framework with a bidirectional arrow.

Distributed relational leadership also influenced programs. The inclusive leadership of the staff developed student ownership and involvement in programs. Student collaboration and involvement in programs supported social justice learning outcomes. Programs are visually represented with a rectangular box with bidirectional arrows toward distributed relational leadership and this study's conceptual framework. The bidirectional arrows represent the mutual influence of programs with distributed relational leadership and the conceptual framework.

The categorical code boxes of community, space, and programs connect to distributed relational leadership and this study's conceptual framework with bidirectional arrows. Influenced by distributed relational leadership, community, space, and programs contributed to the sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students.

The third construct in this grounded theory's conceptual framework represents the emergence of identity development as a categorical code. Identity development emerged as a construct external to the research questions. Including identity development in the conceptual framework recognizes the influence of community, space, and programs on the identity development of underserved students. Thus, in congruence with sense of belonging and mattering, identity development is connected with community, space, and programs with bidirectional arrows. The bidirectional arrows also illustrate the identity development impact on the community, space, and programs of the Center. As students cycle through identity development, they differentially impact the community, space, and programs of the Center.

This grounded theory's conceptual framework is illustrated with three circles representing mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development. The three intersecting circles symbolize the conceptual overlap with the constructs of mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development. Differential sizes of the circles represent levels of influence on retention of underserved students. Mattering emerged as the most influential construct to retention. Many of the distributed relational leadership principles of collaboration and inclusion related to the tenants of mattering. Staff care, student ownership, friendships, mentorships, and familial relationships mirrored the mattering constructs of attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation



(Schlossberg, 1989). Sense of belonging was the second largest circle. Sense of belonging was often associated with the Cross-Cultural Center community and space. Finally, identity development as an emerging construct is represented with the smallest circle.

Retention is visually depicted in a box at the intersection of mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development. The representation of retention at the intersection of the three constructs recognizes the influence of all three constructs on the retention of underserved students. The bidirectional arrows debunk the notion that the emerging retention theory is a stage or linear process. The bidirectional arrows in the model depict the mutual influence of community, space, programs, and distributed relational leadership with retention. The emerging theory recognizes that underserved student retention may be influenced by any of the theoretical codes of the model. Reciprocally, the retention role of cultural centers and the staff influences the Center's community, space, programs, and distributed relational leadership.

### Summary

This chapter presented the results of an examination on cross-cultural center and cross-cultural center staff influence on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Following a constructivist grounded theory analysis the study yielded 977 initial codes, 24 categorical codes, and 5 theoretical codes. The five theoretical codes were: (a) community; (b) space; (c) programs; (d) distributed relational leadership; and (e) identity development. The central or core phenomenon in the grounded theory was distributed relational leadership.

Theoretical codes were presented in relation to the study's research questions. Cross-Cultural Center influence on the sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students was through community and space. Cross-Cultural Center staff influence on the sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students was through programs and relational leadership. Sense of belonging/retention and greetings were categorical codes that emerged from exploring how sense of belonging and mattering relate to underserved students. The construct challenge, support, and readiness may further explain underserved student retention. The rich finding was the emergence of the theoretical code of identity development.

A grounded theory called "Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership and Retention" was proposed in this chapter. The core or central phenomenon—distributed relational leadership—was illustrated in the largest rectangular box on top of the model. Distributed relational leadership, community, space, and programs were displayed in boxes with bidirectional arrows to the conceptual framework. Identity development was added to this study's conceptual framework. Retention was represented at the intersection of mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development. The bidirectional arrows represent the fluidity of the model's constructs in relation to retention.

Chapter 5 presents the significance and meaning of the study's results. The theoretical implications of this grounded theory analysis on the study's conceptual framework are put forth. Practical implications for higher education leaders, recommendations for future research, and the study's limitations are also presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

This final chapter discusses the significance of the research findings. Chapter 5 commences with a review of the study's results. Analysis between the grounded theory and the study's existing literature and conceptual framework is presented. This chapter also presents implications for theory development and cultural centers practice, study limitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter and study ends with concluding remarks.

### Results Review

The purpose of this study was to propose a theory regarding the retention function of cross-cultural centers through the lens of sense of belonging and mattering. Specifically, this study aimed to expand the literature regarding the Center staff role in promoting retention of underserved students. A constructivist grounded theory methodology guided the analysis of the study's research questions (Charmaz, 2006). Seven undergraduate students and one full-time staff member participated in focus groups and interviews to produce the study's primary data set (Creswell, 2008). Document analysis triangulated the focus group and interview data. Five theoretical codes formed a grounded theory from this study. The theoretical codes were: (a) community; (b) space; (c) programs; (d) distributed relational leadership; and (e) identity development. The central or core theoretical category in this study was distributed relational leadership. A theory called "Cultural Center Staff: A Grounded Theory of Distributed Relational Leadership" was proposed in Chapter 4.

Results of the study were guided by the following three research questions:

1. In what ways does a cross-cultural center influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
2. In what ways does a cross-cultural center staff influence sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students?
3. How do underserved students relate to mattering and sense of belonging constructs? Are there other constructs that may explain underserved student retention?

Community and space were the two key constructs related to the Center's influence on the sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Center staff influenced the sense of belonging and mattering of underserved students through programs and distributed relational leadership. Identity development surfaced as an outcome not related to the research questions. The emergent-grounded theory from this study proposed that retention of underserved students was impacted by mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development.

#### Relationship of Grounded Theory to Existing Literature

##### *Distributed Relational Leadership*

The central or core theoretical category of the grounded theory was distributed relational leadership. The core category appears frequently in the data and explains the relationship of other codes and categories (Creswell, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Distributed and relational leadership appeared frequently in this study's data and explained the context of the other categorical and theoretical codes. The combined

leadership styles formed the core category of distributed relational leadership. The Center staff's ability to lead the formation of meaningful relationships served as the central category in explaining the sense of belonging and mattering experienced by underserved students.

### *Relational Leadership*

Cultural center staff members intentionally created relationships with students to promote sense of belonging and mattering. Komives and colleagues (2007) defined relational leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (p. 74). Relationships are the most important element in the leadership process and involve a purposeful intent to create positive change (Komives et al.). Commencing with the purposeful process of greeting students by name, the staff intentionally built relationships with students. This is congruent with Jones and colleagues (2002) who found that underserved students valued the welcoming personas of Center staff. Staff and student relationships influenced sense of belonging and mattering for students and the staff. Relational leadership was also exhibited by showing continued care and concern for students, serving as mentors, and promoting student ownership through the development of residents. Previous studies noted the importance of a welcoming and nurturing staff to student sense of belonging (Jones et al.; June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994).

Staff relational leadership was the core phenomenon that connected the other categories and codes. As Allen and Cherrey (2000) stated, “relationships are the connective tissue of the organization” (p. 31). Staff relationships with students were the

connective tissue in forming community, space, and programs. The staff created community by fostering friendships and familial-type relationships. Students lauded the staff for their friendship and for creating a familial atmosphere in the Center. Staff relational leadership also formed the home-away-from-home and safe-space function of the Center. Students noted that staff diversity and relationships with staff promoted a comfortable, safe, and home-away-from-home environment. Intentional staff relational leadership also promoted distributed leadership.

### *Distributed Leadership*

Distributed leadership with the Center staff developed student ownership and shared leadership with the students. In distributed leadership, “the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situation” are key components to implementing this collaborative, shared leadership philosophy (Spillane, 2006, p. 4). The interactions of the staff with the students in the Cross-Cultural Center created distributed leadership. The interaction of creating meaningful relationships allowed for personalized programmatic assessment and involvement of students. Congruent with Schreiner (2010), this study found that enhancing student ownership in the Center also promoted sense of belonging. Students felt a feeling of ownership and belonging to the programs because of staff relational and distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership also enhanced student ownership and sense of belonging to the Center. Distributed leadership is implemented “by design” through the decisions and actions of the formal and informal leaders (Spillane, 2006, p. 41). Staff in this study exhibited distributed leadership by intentionally forming trusting and meaningful

relationships with students. By design, staff members formed relationships with students to promote student ownership in the Center. Student ownership was displayed by the formation of Center “residents” who were entrusted by the staff to perform staff-like responsibilities such as providing Center tours and staffing the Center. Distributed leadership also transcends roles and positions within the organization (Spillane). Center staff distributed leadership in this study meant that the student staff served an equally important role as the full-time staff in creating student ownership. In some cases, the student staff produced stronger Center student ownership than the full-time staff. Patton (2006) described distributed leadership through the significant contribution of the Administrative Assistant of the Black Cultural Center in promoting student sense of belonging. The grounded theory from this study suggests that distributed relational leadership promotes student sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Distributed relational leadership also formed a strong sense of community.

### *Community*

The literature associates community with sense of belonging and mattering (Brazzell, 2001; Schreiner, 2010; Young, 2003). Brazzell noted that students seek community and sense of belonging on campus and that lack of community impacts retention decisions. Similarly, June (1996) found cultural centers promote persistence through cultural bonding and sense of community. Patton, McEwen, Rendon, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) call on cultural centers to serve as a haven for students to deal with microaggressions and to form support and community. The sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students in this study were enhanced by feelings of being a

member of the community. Relationships of mutual respect and trust formed community and promoted sense of belonging and mattering (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The sense of community and relationships with other students assisted with coping through a friend's death and campus hate crimes.

### *Family*

A familial atmosphere in the Center served as a pillar of support for the students in this study to cope through difficult times. Forming community by creating familial-type relationships was described in student affairs literature. Young (2003) noted community "as a value" to the student affairs profession characterized by an "organic conception of social relationships, a few steps up from the family" (p. 100). Relational and distributed leadership formed a familial-type community in the Center. The familial atmosphere of the Center assisted students with working through problematic situations. The use of sibling and familial titles (brother, mother) also characterized the family atmosphere of the Center. The significance of family was further explored through Tinto's (1993) notion of separation from prior community.

The desire of underserved students to find community may further inform challenges to Tinto's (1993) notion of separation from prior community. As noted in Chapter 2, Tinto argued that students must separate from family and friends in order to promote persistence. Researchers challenged the applicability of Tinto's separation of prior community to the retention of underserved students (Berger & Milem, 1999; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). McDonald (2002) contends that students seek community when selecting and entering a university to find a sense of



belonging. Students in this study may have intentionally sought to form community in the Cross-Cultural Center. The community associated with the Center served as a familial function for students. Thus, underserved students may be intentionally seeking to add or replace prior community support with the community of the Center. Replacing prior community adds credence to Tinto's theory of separation. However, adding the Center's community to prior community support further challenges Tinto's theory. This study clearly supported the desire of students to form a community and the Center serving as a retention source (McDonald). This study was not conclusive regarding students' use of the cumulative impact of previous community and Center community to facilitate retention. However, this study supported the role of dialogue in building community.

### *Dialogue*

Dialogue is recognized in the literature as important attributes to community. Community is formed through dialogue between individuals who share different perspectives to "create shared meaning on subjects of mutual concern" (Young, 2003, p. 117). Programming is recognized as a means to building community (Roberts, 2003). As noted in Chapter 4, staff-facilitated dialogues contributed to formation of community in the Center. Dialogue based programming promoted learning, mutual respect, and raised student awareness of diverse social identities (June, 1996).

Formal and/or informal conversations also contributed to building community in the Center. Cultural centers were recognized as a space in which students engage in formal or informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff (Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). As mentioned in Chapter 4, facilitating conversations about various diversity and

social justice topics was part of the purpose of the Center. Additionally, informal conversations among students and between students and staff built a sense of community and safe space.

### *Space*

Similar to the results of this study, the literature described the space functions of the Center as a safe space, a home away from home that offered a multitude of resources for underserved students (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). As mentioned in Chapter 4, student experiences in the Center were initiated with welcomes and greetings by name. Hoffman and colleagues (2002) found that faculty member's knowledge and use of students' names promoted a sense of belonging. This study contributes to the literature by proposing that cultural center staff greetings to underserved students by name fosters retention. Welcoming students by name when entering the Center initiates the creation of safe space.

### *Safe Space*

Results of this study confirmed the safe-space function of cultural centers (Patton, 2006; Princes, 1994). As reported in Chapter 4, staff members created a comfortable, safe space in the Center that celebrated and acknowledged underserved students. Staff members in this study reiterated that creating a safe space for underserved students was part of the purpose of the Cross-Cultural Center. The Center also provided underserved students in this study with a space to decrease feelings of isolation, alienation, and lack of belonging (June, 1996; Patton; Welch, 2008). Students used the Center as a reprieve from

unwelcoming classrooms and other spaces on campus (Turner, 1994). Students also reported loneliness and isolation when the Center was closed on a furlough day. The safe-space function of the Center contributed to the call for more space.

### *Extension of Space*

The need for an expansion of the Center in this study reflects the space challenges noted in the literature (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Cultural centers are often undersized and in remote campus locations (Jones et al.; Patton). As noted in Chapter 4, students and staff reported the need to expand the Center space in order to accommodate all student users. However, the location of this Center ran counter to the literature (Jones et al; Patton). The Cross-Cultural Center's proximity to the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Pride Center and cafeteria were cited as positive aspects to the Center's location. The literature is silent regarding the proximity outcomes of LGBT, women's, and other community centers to Cross-Cultural Centers. Thus, this study contributes evidence that placing cultural and community centers in close proximity to each other positively impacts the sense of belonging, mattering, and retention of underserved students. The location and safe space contributed to the home-away-from-home function of the Center.

### *Home Away From Home*

Cross-cultural centers serving as a home away from home was supported by the results of this study. Home is depicted in the literature as a haven and refuge to escape and relax (Mallett, 2004; Moore, 1984). The home-away-from-home environment was a

place where students can be themselves, spend time with friends, fulfill various academic and cocurricular needs, relax, escape, and feel safe (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996). As reported in Chapter 4, students completed homework, relaxed, slept, ate, and felt at home in the Center. References to Center furniture and the living room atmosphere of the Center were also associations related to home. Utilization of the Center resources contributed to the home-away-from-home function of the Center.

### *Resources*

Resources offered in the Center contributed to a sense of belonging for students. Welch (2008) found that three centers enhanced sense of belonging for underrepresented students through access to center resources. Privilege to use inanimate resources such as the microwave, computers, library, and couches were congruent with previous cultural center studies (Patton, 2006; Welch). Students also valued the staff as resources. Staff members were lauded for imparting knowledge of campus procedures and referrals to appropriate offices (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Patton). Staff members in this study also promoted sense of belonging and mattering through educational programs.

### *Programs*

This study supported the educational programming role in promoting sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Social justice, program impact, and student ownership were significant factors with educational programs. Programming was defined as “a planned activity with individuals or student groups that is theoretically based and has as its intent the promotion of personal development and learning”

(Saunders & Cooper, 2001, p. 310). Social justice learning outcomes were realized in various program formats, including: (a) film and lecture series; (b) cultural musical performances; and (c) dialogue groups (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Princes, 1994; Young, 1989; Young, 1991). As noted in Chapter 4, staff-led programming furthered student understanding of cultural awareness and social justice issues.

The finding of this study regarding the impact of programs contributes new insights to the cultural center literature. Center programs enhanced feelings of value, appreciation, and recognition for students. Recognition programs such as the All People's Celebration formally acknowledged community members for their social justice work and promoted a sense of pride for the staff programmers. Pride from successful programming often emanated from the collaborative programming process.

The collaborative programming process led by the staff in this study created student ownership of the programs. Student ownership was created through intentional involvement and partnership with students in the programming process. By actively engaging students in the programming process, students were colearners and served as valuable resources to address community needs (Roberts, 2003). Involving students to address their concerns through programs promotes individual growth and community development (Komives et al., 2007). Roberts coined the student-involved programming process as community-building programs. Community-building programs promote shared ownership, sustainability, and learning (Roberts). Staff distributed relational leadership in this study enhanced student ownership in programs and also impacted the academic and career identity development of students.

## *Identity Development*

### *Academic and Career*

This study provides groundbreaking findings regarding cultural center staff influence on the academic decisions of underserved students. Educational Opportunity Program staff supported the short- and long-term academic and career development of Cambodian American students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008). However, the cultural center literature is relatively silent on the impact of cultural centers or cultural center staff on the academic and career identity of underserved students. June (1996) references an academic counseling role for cultural center staff. However, the academic influence of the cultural center staff was not presented as a significant finding for June's study. This study contributes evidence that cultural center staff influence the academic major and minor declarations of underserved students. As noted in Chapter 4, student involvement in the Center influenced their decisions to declare majors such as sociology and kinesiology.

This study also contributes new evidence regarding cultural center staff influence on the career development of underserved students. Another rich finding is the phenomenon of student staff members developing interest in higher education student affairs as a result of their experiences as a cultural center staff member. Again, the literature lacks any evidence of cultural center impact on the career development of underserved students, specifically the influence on pursuing a higher education student affairs career. A dearth of literature also exists regarding activist identity development and cultural centers.

### *Activist*

Development of an activist identity connects students to the formation of cultural centers. Student activism was a common antecedent to the creation of university cultural centers (Ago, 2002; Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002). While the literature notes a relationship with the formation of centers and activism, there is a dearth of evidence regarding cultural center and center staff influence on developing students' activist identity. Involvement in the Cross-Cultural Center influenced the activist identity development of students in this study. Campus hate crimes were the impetus for students to apply and further refine their activist identities. Results of this study indicate that the cultural center and staff cultivated more of an activist identity than racial identity.

### *Racial Identity*

Results of racial identity development and cultural centers were not as significant as previous studies. Through mono-racial and cross-racial interaction and programs, cultural centers supported the racial identity of underserved students (Ago, 2002; Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Patton, 2006). References to cultural awareness in this study indicate a racial identity development role for the cultural center and center staff. Patton included Cross's (1991) model of psychological nigrescence as part of the study's theoretical foundation to examine Black cultural centers. A staff member in this study named racial identity development theory as a theory that guides cultural center practice (Interview, March 25, 2010).

Studies recommended future analysis of multiracial and racial identity development with students and staff of cultural centers (Ago, 2002; Longerbeam et al.,

2003). Future research should investigate the relationship of racial identity development with sense of belonging and mattering in university cultural centers. The following section addresses the proposed grounded theory to the study's theoretical framework.

### Relationship of Grounded Theory to Theoretical Framework

#### *Sense of Belonging*

Sense of belonging is defined as “the psychological sense that one is a valued member of the community” (Hausmann et al., 2007, p. 804). In this study, community was significant in promoting sense of belonging. Friendship, familial-type relationships, and dialogue forged feelings of being a “valued member of the community” (Hausmann et al., p. 804). Feelings of solidarity and energy associated with being a member of the Cross-Cultural Center community embody Hausmann and colleagues' definition of sense of belonging. An analysis of community and other findings of this study with the sense of belonging literature are provided below.

Student involvement in the Cross-Cultural Center is congruent with literature that associates cocurricular programs with sense of belonging (Hagerty et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maestas et al., 2007; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). This study affirmed cultural centers as a cocurricular resource for promoting sense of belonging for underserved students (Patton, 2006; Welch, 2008). Congruent with Hurtado and Carter, this study supported the literature claiming that interaction with diverse peers significantly increases students' sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Maestas et al.; Strayhorn, 2008). As noted in Chapter 4, interaction with diverse Center staff and students in this study contributed to sense of belonging.



This study argues that student interaction with staff increases sense of belonging for underserved students. The retention function of student interaction with faculty and graduate students is well-documented (Bean, 1983; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton et al., 2000; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Nora et al., 1996). Findings from this study contribute understanding regarding the retention function of the staff. As noted by Tinto's retention theory (1993), academic and social integration operationalizes as sense of belonging. The distributed relational leadership of the staff promoted academic identity development and social integration into the campus community. Thus, congruent with Patton (2006), this study found that Cross-Cultural Center staff influenced sense of belonging for underserved students.

### *Mattering*

Findings from the emerging grounded theory support the study's definition of mattering. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) defined mattering as "a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension" (p. 165). Results of this study also reflect Schlossberg's (1989) five characteristics of mattering: (a) attention; (b) importance; (c) dependence; d) ego-extension; and (e) appreciation. The constructs of distributed relational leadership in this study mirror the characteristics of mattering theory. Greetings, staff care, staff as friends, staff as mentors, and student ownership contributed to student feelings of mattering. An analysis of the study's findings in relation to Schlossberg's five characteristics of mattering is below.

### *Attention*

As noted in Chapter 4, the construct of greetings in this study shares similar qualities with the mattering characteristic of attention. Attention is defined as “the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). By greeting students by name as they entered and exited the Center, staff promoted mattering for underserved students. Students recognized that staff members’ knowledge of their names showed interest in them. Knowledge and calling students by name is an important vehicle of noticing or showing interest in others. Hoffman and colleagues (2002) found that faculty exhibited care for students by calling and recognizing them by name. The literature also noted cultural center staff’s ability to exhibit attention through their welcoming personas and genuine interest in students (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Patton, 2006). Staff greeting students by name serves as a pathway to realizing Schlossberg’s construct of importance.

### *Importance*

This study’s construct of staff care supported the mattering characteristic of importance. Importance is “to believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do or is concerned with our fate (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). As noted in Chapter 4, staff members exhibited care and characteristics of importance for students. Caring about students’ family situations and opinions translates feelings of importance to students. Staff care was congruent with literature that recognized cultural center staff for being warm, caring, and nurturing (Jones et al., 2002). Results of this study indicate that the Cross-Cultural Center staff exhibited behaviors that are congruent

with Rosenberg and McCullough's definition of importance. Staff care was also associated with the mattering characteristic of dependence.

### *Dependence*

The study's constructs of staff care, staff as friends, and staff as mentors relate to the mattering characteristic of dependence. Dependence occurs when "our behavior is influenced by our dependence on other people" (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Distributed relational leadership formed friendships and mentorships between staff and students. These friendship and mentorship relationships indicate a dependence on others to feel mattering. For example, students exhibited dependence by naming a certain staff member as a source of support, friendship, and mentorship (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Likewise, a staff member depended on a student's compliment rather than intrinsic motivation to feel pride with a completed program (Focus Group, March 17, 2010).

The literature is relatively silent regarding dependent relationships and cultural centers. Cultural center staff was noted as "accountable and reliable" (Jones et al., 2002, p. 30). While accountability and reliability may relate to dependence, it does not appear that the literature directly addresses dependence and cultural centers. Thus, this study contributes knowledge to the literature regarding the impact of friendships and mentorships on the dependence characteristic of mattering.

### *Ego-Extension and Appreciation*

Programs provide relevance to the mattering constructs of ego-extension and appreciation. Ego-extension "refers to the feeling that other people will be proud of our

accomplishments or saddened by our failures (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 10). Appreciation occurs when “we feel that others are thankful for what we are and what we do” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 22). Students expressed pride and appreciation to staff for involving them in the program process (Focus Group, March 4, 2010). Staff exhibited pride and appreciation for program success through the compliments and actions of students (Interview, March 25, 2010). Staff application of the characteristics of ego-extension and appreciation created student ownership in programming. Similar to dependence, the cultural center literature has not included ego-extension and appreciation as research constructs. The dearth of literature on the mattering principles of dependence, ego-extension, and appreciation guides the implications for theory development.

#### Implications for Theory Development

This study’s grounded theory of cultural center staff impact on retention provides insights on the development of future theory. This study’s central or core category of distributed relational leadership indicates a need to further examine the influence of staff leadership on underserved student retention. The Center staff in this study exhibited distributed relational leadership by intentionally building meaningful relationships (Komives et al., 2007). Building these meaningful relationships was collaboratively distributed among the staff members (Spillane, 2006). Previous research on cultural center staff addressed motivation, prejudice, and perceptions by students (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). However, a dearth of literature exists regarding the impact of cultural center staff on retention. This

study's grounded theory of cultural center staff retention proposes an important construct for ongoing theory development. Theories focused on the retention of underserved students will be guided by the significance of staff leadership. Further examination of cultural center staff distributed and relational leadership may shed further insight to this study's cultural center staff retention theory.

The proposed grounded theory's inclusion of mattering guides continual development of retention theories. The examination of mattering at the university level has been limited to first-year students and comparisons of African American and non-African American students (Cuyjet, 1998; Fetty, 2005; Gibson & Myers, 2006; Gossett et al., 1996; Myers & Bechtel, 2004; Phillips, 2005; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Results of this study introduce the cross-cultural center and center staff influence on mattering and retention of underserved students. Findings on the mattering principles of greetings and importance serve as important indicators for further examination of mattering and retention of underserved students. Further research is needed to explain the impact of dependence, ego-extension, and appreciation on cultural centers and student retention. The influence of mattering with underserved students in this study calls for the inclusion of mattering for the development of future theories on retention.

The emerging theory further challenges the applicability of Tinto's (1993) *A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure* to underserved students. As noted in Chapter 2, Tinto's theory combines preentry attributes and institutional factors as considerations for student departure. Faculty/staff interaction, academic integration, and social integration are constructs of the model that relate to this study. Tinto's theory is considered to be a seminal framework for examining higher education retention (Braxton

et al., 2000). Researchers have challenged the applicability of Tinto's theory to underserved students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Results of this study call for Tinto's theory to include staff distributed relational leadership when considering the impact of faculty/staff interactions on underserved student retention. This study also calls for the addition of mattering when examining the academic and social integration of underserved students. Including distributed relational leadership and mattering in future retention theories will have implications for student affairs practice.

### Implications for Educational Practice

#### *Retention*

Supporting cultural centers as a retention source for underserved students guides educational leaders with closing the educational achievement gap. The educational achievement gap for a rising underserved collegiate population is the disparity of student outcomes between White and Asian students with Black, Latinos, Native/Indigenous, Southeast Asian, and their Pacific Islander peers (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Valencia (2002) further defined the disparity of student outcomes as the "persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate low rates of student test scores, retention, and college-enrollment" (p. 4).

This study's emerging cultural center staff retention theory grounds educational practice to narrow the educational achievement gap. Implementing distributed relational leadership in cultural center work informs the creation of community, space, and programs. The interaction of these constructs with mattering, sense of belonging, and identity development promotes retention. Results of this study support cultural centers as

a resource to decrease the educational achievement gap with underserved students (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994).

### *Resources*

Universities are provided with additional evidence regarding the need to support cultural centers as a retention source for underserved students. Results support the literature's call for increased space for cultural centers (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Sufficient space is needed to realize the greetings, safe-space, home-away-from-home, and resource functions of the centers. Adequate space for staff to create a home away from home encourages sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. Multifunctional programmatic space will support the social justice educational mission for the Center and the institution. Moreover, a programmatic space that fosters student ownership and involvement facilitates sense of belonging and mattering. In addition to examining the size and functionality of space, educational leaders should consider location factors for cultural centers.

Although not a significant finding in this study, location concerns noted in the literature and in this study warrant the consideration of educational leaders. Cultural centers placed in remote campus locations questioned institutional missions regarding diversity (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006). Student staff in this study criticized the social justice and diversity mission of the institution due to the inadequate size of the Center (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Insufficient center space and remote campus locations provide a symbolic leadership concern for educators. Symbolic leadership provides a frame for educators regarding how students create meaning of the institutional

environment (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Ample space and a centralized, prominent campus location for the Center realize symbolic leadership and may increase student ownership. The value of student ownership informs educators with the importance of including students in center services and programs. Thus, it is imperative to infuse students into the assessment, implementation, and evaluation of center space, location, staffing, and other initiatives.

Distributed relational leadership as the central category of the grounded theory reflects the powerful role of cultural center staff to facilitate sense of belonging, mattering, and retention of underserved students. Sanlo (2000) reiterated the importance of adequate services, resources, and staffing of centers. The distributed relational leadership of the staff in this study created a sense of community, safe space, social justice programming, and identity development. Although not rising to a categorical or theoretical code, the need for increased staffing was noted in the initial coding of the transcripts. Institutions need to provide adequate staffing for cultural centers to realize the positive impacts of distributed relational leadership. Similar to the student role with space, institutions need to involve students with staffing decisions for cultural centers. Center staff positional leaders should consider distributed relational leadership constructs to infuse students and staff in the retention of underserved students.

### *Center Leadership*

This study's grounded theory findings on distributed relational leadership inform cultural center staff of theory to practice. Distributed leadership infuses multiple leaders to influence affect, knowledge, and practice (Spillane, 2006). Staff positional leaders



should consider a distributed leadership style that infuses the strengths of the entire staff. Distributing responsibilities among the staff to create sense of community and a safe-space/home-away-from-home environment promotes mattering and sense of belonging for underserved students. Recognizing that distributed leadership works off the interaction between leaders and followers accentuates the necessity to infuse relational leadership (Spillane). Building relationships is the most important component to the relational leadership process (Komives et al., 2007). Influencing the staff to establish meaningful relationships with students promotes mattering, sense of belonging, and retention of underserved students. The emerging theory and significance of distributed relational leadership informs staff selection.

### *Selection*

Distributed relational leadership informs the selection of cultural center staff. The findings reflect the importance of selecting cultural center staff members who have the knowledge, skills, and experience to create a home away from home for underserved students (Patton, 2006). Previous literature also suggested that center staff needs to reflect the social identities and understand the needs of underserved students (June, 1996; Patton). While selecting cultural center staff based on knowledge, skills, and experience is important, this study argues that educational leaders select professionals with a distributed relational leadership philosophy. This study moves center staff selection criteria from the “what” to the “how.” Rather than focusing on qualities of a cultural center staff candidate, educational leaders should assess a candidate’s ability to infuse a leadership process.

Assessing a candidate's ability to implement a leadership process may be practically difficult. However, educational leaders may assess the intentional collaboration and shared distributed leadership style of candidates (Spillane, 2006). Relational leadership may be assessed through interview questions addressing inclusion, empowerment, and ethics (Komives et al., 2007). Center staff positional leaders implementing a leadership philosophy based on inclusion, empowerment, and relationship building facilitates mattering, sense of belonging, and retention of underserved students (Komives et al.). Center staff teams are also guided by the emerging findings of identity development.

### *Identity Development*

The emerging theme of identity development further directs cultural center staff-retention practices. Coupled with literature on racial identity development, cultural center staff members are informed about the influence of academic and career identities on sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students. The findings of this study call on center staff to acquire knowledge of academic and career resources. Center staff members were lauded for being effective referral sources (Longerbeam et al., 2003; Patton, 2006). Center staff members need to know appropriate academic and career services to effectively refer students. Moreover, cultural center staff could collaborate with academic advising and career services to promote the development of student academic and career identities. Career identity development may use values-based or personality-type assessments to further inform students of their academic and career options (Brown, 1996; Holland, 1992). Collaborative cultural center, academic advising,

and career center programs may clarify student values and assess personality types to promote academic and career identity development. Furthering student academic and career identity development contributes to the sense of belonging, mattering, and retention of underserved students.

Student staff interest in higher education careers guide the professional development of cultural center student staff members. As noted in Chapter 4, the experience of being a student staff member contributed to interest in pursuing a higher education faculty and/or student affairs careers (Focus Group, March 17, 2010). Cultural center staff leadership should capitalize on the potential development of future higher education leaders. Cultural center staff leadership could provide intentional opportunities for student staff to learn and consider higher education careers. Actively encouraging student staff to pursue higher education careers may strengthen the pipeline of future cultural center leadership.

### *Location*

Results of this study guide educators with location recommendations of multiple cultural and community centers on a university campus. Educators need to consider the positive feedback from this study regarding the close proximity of the Cross-Cultural Center to the LGBTQ Pride Center. Document analysis from this study indicates that the Cross-Cultural Center, LGBTQ Pride Center, and Women's Center collectively identify as the Social Justice Centers (Sheikh, 2009d, p. 1). Placing centers in close proximity to each other may enhance collaborative social justice learning endeavors for the combined centers and the campus. The Cross-Cultural Center collaborates with the LGBTQ Pride

Center and Women's Center on public relations material, training, and programming (Sheikh, p. 1). Adjacent or close proximity of Centers may also enhance underserved student sense of belonging. Welch (2008) found that marginalized students felt a sense of belonging through their involvement in three campus community centers. One student in this study named the Cross-Cultural Center and LGBTQ Pride Center as his home away from home (Focus Group, December 3, 2009). This study provides evidence for community and cultural center staff to advocate for centers to be located in close proximity with each other. Placing cultural and community centers in close proximity to each other may enhance social justice learning outcomes and underserved student retention.

#### Limitations

Several precautions should be considered before applying this study's grounded theory to underserved students. Epistemological and research methodologies for this study were not meant to produce generalizable data. Rather, this study aspired to garner an in-depth experience of a certain phenomenon in one particular setting. Limited literature about the experiences of underserved students in cultural centers called for qualitative methods (Brown et al., 2002; Creswell, 2008). Through a critical theory epistemology and constructivist grounded theory research design, I filtered the data through my positionality and experiences in cultural centers and student affairs (Charmaz, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). A grounded theory emerged to explain the subjective experiences of underserved students at one university cultural center (Charmaz; Grbich, 2007). Member checking and using three forms of data increase the

trustworthiness of the emerging theory (Creswell, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The emerging theory sought to explain student experiences rather than generalize to underserved students at other institutions.

The research setting and participants further limit the generalizability of the study's results. The study explored the experiences of underserved students in one cultural center at one university. Researching the Cross-Cultural Center at one institution and purposeful sampling produced rich data that generated a theory of student experiences (Charmaz, 2005; Creswell, 2008). Underserved student and cultural center staff experiences at other institutions may yield different results and theories.

Participant characteristics may also limit the application of the results to other institutions. One full-time staff member and three students staff the Cross-Cultural Center. A combination of different full-time and student staffing may produce divergent results and theories. Results of socioeconomic status may question the application of results to lower socioeconomic students. While many students self-reported middle class standing, the highest reported income was \$30,000. Providing additional information or ranges of income to increase clarity of student socioeconomic status would strengthen the results of this study.

The context of the research setting also contributes some caution to generalizing the study's results to other institutions. As noted in Chapter 4, a series of hate crimes impacted the campus during data collection. The impact of the hate crimes may have bolstered categories such as community and activist identity. Results in the same setting without hate crimes may have produced a different theory.

### Recommendations for Future Research

A theory of cultural center staff leadership and retention emerged from the constructivist grounded theory methodology. Several rich findings from the data warrant further study. Application of different research methods and investigation of emerging themes from the study may yield further understanding to this study's theory.

Distributed relational leadership as the central or core category of this study calls for further examination of cultural center staff leadership. Results of this study contributed to the dearth of research on cultural center staff (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Longerbeam et al., 2003; Patton, 2006). Using different qualitative methodological analyses to further understand the influence of distributed relational leadership on underserved student retention is recommended. A phenomenological study may garner in-depth understanding regarding the meaning of relationships in cross-cultural center work (Grbich, 2007). Furthermore, a cross-case study analysis of cultural center staff and distributed relational leadership may further inform this study's grounded retention theory (Yin, 2009). Additional research of cultural center staff leadership and their impact on underserved student retention may narrow the educational achievement gap.

Future research may explore cultural center staff relationships and the ethical construct in relational leadership (Komives et al., 2007). Relational leadership suggests implementing an inclusive, empowering, and process-oriented approach to resolving ethical dilemmas (Komives et al.). The friendship, mentorship, and familial relationships between cultural center staff and students could be examined from an ethical leadership perspective. The ethics of leadership is guided by the principle of caring (Fried, 2007; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Gilligan's stages of female moral development may

contribute to the theoretical foundation of this future analysis. The three stages include: (a) caring about self; (b) caring about others; and (c) balancing care for self with care for others. Gilligan's stage model may inform a future analysis regarding the moral decisions cultural center staff members make to realize relational leadership. How does Gilligan's theory guide staff with ethical dilemmas? How do student staff members react to a community ethical violation or to an alleged violation of the campus code of student conduct? A future inquiry guided by the aforementioned research questions may further inform staff with realizing relational leadership principles in cultural center work.

The rich finding of academic and career identity development calls for further analysis of this phenomenon in a cultural center setting. An analysis of academic and career identity development may be informed by seminal career development theories. Future analysis may use Super's (1984) life-span, life-space theory and Holland's (1992) theory of vocational choice as a theoretical framework. Super's theory assumes that environmental determinants (peer group, community, family) interact with personal determinants (values, interests) to determine careers (Evans, 2007). Holland's theory professes that individuals select careers that match their personality and environment (Zunker, 1998). Exploring the environmental influence of cultural centers with student's personality and personal determinants may explain cultural center impact on the academic and career identity of underserved students. Inquiry on the influence of academic and career identity on underserved student retention may inform this study's grounded theory.

## Conclusion

While I was an undergraduate, the Cross-Cultural Center served as my home away from home. It was my space to gather with peers, relax, eat, “talk story,” plan for student organization events, and dialogue about diversity and identity issues. Talk story is a term used in Hawai’i to mean chitchat, catch up with old friends, or gossip. This comfortable environment created a sense of belonging that anchored my academic and cocurricular success. The Center staff was passionately engaged in raising awareness of social justice issues and creating a welcoming environment of students from diverse cultures. I was validated by their personal care and concern as they frequently pushed aside administrative work for my benefit. Coupled with other student involvement activities, the Center space, staff, and experience propelled me into a higher education student affairs career.

Results of this study inform my experiences as an undergraduate and full-time staff member in cultural centers. The center staff practiced distributed relational leadership in creating a sense of community, safe space, home away from home, and programs. Sense of belonging and mattering contributed to my academic and career success. Staff care and mentorship influenced my decision to reciprocate the experience for future students by becoming a cultural center staff member. As a full-time cultural center staff member, a student told me, “If it wasn’t for you and the Cross-Cultural Center, I would not be here.” That quote propelled this inquiry into underserved student retention and cultural centers. As a result of this study, I now have an emerging theory to support cultural centers as I move into positional and nonpositional leadership roles in higher education.



## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Flyer and Staff Script for Students

# Attention: 1st & 2nd year students

Would you like to participate in a study about university cross-cultural centers?



Volunteers will participate in:

- ❖ 3- Focus groups (90 minutes each) during 09-10 academic year
  - **FREE** Food and beverages
  - Be entered for an opportunity drawing for a **\$25** campus bookstore gift card

\* If you'd like to participate or receive more information about this study, contact:

Greg Toya  
[gtoya@csusm.edu](mailto:gtoya@csusm.edu)  
760-750-4935

### Recruitment Script

Hello (insert name if known). How are you? Are you a first or second year student?

*If yes*, great. Our colleague and friend, Greg Toya, is examining university cross-cultural centers for a dissertation study. Greg is the Associate Dean of Students and a doctoral student in the joint Educational Leadership doctoral program at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego. As a former cross-cultural center director, Greg's experience and study will help further understand the influence of cross-cultural centers on students. Here is a flyer regarding the study (hand student the flyer). Please contact Greg if you would like to participate or learn more about the study.

*If no*, OK. Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Script for Students at the Center

*Researcher will randomly approach students at CSUSM in Fall 2009 and Center open hours during Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semester.*

Hello. My name is Greg Toya and I am the Associate Dean of Students and a doctoral student in the joint Educational Leadership doctoral program at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego. Are you a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year student?

*If no, OK. Thank you for your time.*

If yes, great. For my dissertation, I am asking 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students to participate in my study. I am examining the influence of cross-cultural centers with feelings of sense of belonging and mattering. Your participation would include a three (3) ninety (90) minute focus group discussions over the course of the 2009-10 academic year. The first focus group is scheduled on DATE and TIME and PLACE. The second ninety (90) minute focus group discussion will be in January or February 2010 and the third and final 90 minute focus group will be in April or May 2010. As an incentive for your participation, you will receive heavy appetizers and beverages at the focus group discussions and eligible for a \$25 opportunity drawing for your campus bookstore. Would you be willing to participate in my study?

If no, thank you for your time.

If yes, great. Please tell me your name, telephone number, and campus e-mail address so I may send you further information about my study and the focus groups. Here is my business card (*Hand the student a business card*) and a flyer regarding the study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this study. Do you currently have any questions? Thank you.

#### E-mail Reminder

Dear STUDENT NAME,

This is a reminder regarding your voluntary participation in a focus group on DATE, TIME, PLACE. My name is Greg Toya and I am the Associate Dean of Students and a doctoral student in the joint Educational Leadership doctoral program at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego. Your participation is completely voluntary and will not in any way affect you or your standing as a student. Please review and bring the attached CSUSM Informed Consent form and Demographics form to the focus group interview.

Please reply to this e-mail or phone (760) 750-4935 to confirm your participation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this study.

Regards,  
Greg Toya

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Protocol for Students

Good evening. Thank you for participating in this focus group interview. My name is Greg Toya and I am the Associate Dean of Students and a doctoral student in the joint Educational Leadership doctoral program at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego. I have invited you to seek your help in examining the influence of cross-cultural centers with feelings of *mattering* and *sense of belonging*. Your participation this evening is completely voluntary and will not in any way affect you or your standing as a student and you may feel free to leave the interview at any point.

With your permission, this focus group will be video and audio recorded. This will help me to retain your ideas more accurately for future research analysis. Your responses will be kept confidential and available only to the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor.

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time. If the length of the interview is inconvenient for you, you may stop the interview at any time without any consequence to you. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate in the study. Are there any questions before we begin the interview?

As an appreciation for your participation in my study, please help yourself to the food and drink. Also, if you participate in all three focus groups, you will be entered into a \$25 opportunity drawing for your campus bookstore.

I have **six** questions and some possible follow-up questions to ask you. Please feel free to individually answer any and/or all questions. Please let me know if you would like any questions repeated. The whole process will take about 90 minutes.

If you wish to continue participation, please review and sign the CSUSM Informed Consent form. The Consent form was e-mailed to you as an attachment. Please let me know if you need another copy of the form (Provide student with consent form, if needed).

Thank you for completing the consent forms. Next, I am requesting that you please complete the Demographics form. (Provide student with demographics form). The Demographics form was e-mailed to you as an attachment. Please let me know if you need another copy of the form (Provide student with consent form, if needed). Thank you.

Each of you has been assigned a letter. Your letter is noted on the piece of paper in front of you. To track what each participant in sharing and maintain confidentiality, please say your letter before speaking and refer to each other with this letter. For example, this student is "A." Before this student speaks say "A" and then speak. If you refer to something that "A" said, then refer to that person as "A."

Are there any questions regarding using these letters as your identification?

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Demographics Form for Students

#### **Demographics**

Please indicate the following:

University class standing (e.g. first year):

Major:

High School GPA:

ACT or SAT Score:

Gender Identity:

Ethnic Identity:

Highest parental level of education:

Family Income:

Social Economic Status (circle one) :

Low

Middle

Upper Middle

Upper

Date:

Your letter for this study

## APPENDIX E

### Consent Form for Students



#### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

##### **Invitation to Participate**

Gregory J. Toya, an administrator at California State University San Marcos and a graduate student researcher in the CSUSM/UC San Diego Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, is conducting a study on cross-cultural centers. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a first or second year student.

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of cross-cultural centers on the sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students.

##### **Description of Procedures**

You will participate in three focus group interviews during the 2009-10 academic year. Each focus group will take approximately 90 minutes. With your permission the interview will be audio and video recorded. The interviews will take place in a private room on campus.

##### **Demographics Form and Focus Group Questions**

Please review the attached Demographics form. You will be asked to disclose personal information such as social identities, GPA, SAT scores, and family socioeconomic status. Your demographic information will be used to verify your inclusion in the study. In addition, demographic information may yield themes related to the study's constructs (sense of belonging and mattering). There will be approximately six questions for each focus group with the possibility of some follow-up questions. Follow-up questions will clarify or further your responses to the original six questions. The topic of the focus group questions will be about the Cross-Cultural Center, the Center staff, sense of belonging, and mattering.

##### **Risks and Inconveniences**

There are minimal risks attached to this study. With the constructs of mattering and sense of belonging, positive physical and psychological responses should transpire. However, the following potential risks may produce a physical or psychological response from you:

- Time. Each focus group is approximately 90 minutes. You will spend approximately 4.5 hours on this study.
- Social identity disclosure. You will be asked to disclose personal information about your academics, income, gender identity and other demographic information.
- Coercion. You may feel coerced into participating with the study. You may experience discomfort or an obligation to participate in the study if a staff member recruited you for the study.
- Focus Group and/or Demographics form questions. Discussing your social identities and experiences with the Center may elicit physical and psychological responses.
- Audio and Video recording. The recording of interviews may cause concern about confidentiality.
- Identity disclosure. In disclosing personal information and Center experiences, you may worry about being identified in the study.
- Interview transcription service. Utilization of a professional transcription service may cause concern for confidentiality.

##### **Safeguards, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Nature**

The following safeguards address the aforementioned potential risks and inconveniences:

- Time. The researcher will clearly state the amount of participation time for the study before and during the research process. The researcher will monitor the time during the interview process. If the allocated time has expired and the interview is still occurring, the researcher will stress the voluntary nature of staying beyond the anticipated allocated time to complete the interview. If the lengths of the interviews are inconvenient for you, you may stop participating in the interview at any time without any consequence to you. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate.
- Social identity disclosure, identity disclosure, interview and demographics form questions, and audio and video recording confidentiality. Interview responses will be kept confidential and available only to the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor for analysis purposes. Interview recordings will be locked in a safe place. Only the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor will analyze the information provided by you and other participants. Interview responses will not be linked to your name or address. We do this to ensure your responses remain confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any point or may decline to answer any question. You may individually answer any and/or all questions. There will no consequences for not answering any of the questions.
- Coercion. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not in any way affect you or your standing as a student or staff member. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate in the study.
- Professional transcription service. The professional transcription service will not receive participant name, address, or any other private form of identification.

### Benefits

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely benefit Cal State San Marcos and University of California, San Diego students in the future. However, sharing your stories of your experiences with the Cross-Cultural Center should be an enjoyable and informative experience.

### Questions

If you have any questions about this study I will be happy to answer them now. If you have any questions in the future, please contact the researcher, Greg Toya, Dean of Students Office, 3600 Craven Hall, 760-750-4935, [gtoya@csusm.edu](mailto:gtoya@csusm.edu) or the researcher's advisor/professor, Dr. Lorri Santamaria at (760) 750-8520.

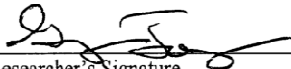
I agree to participate in this research study  
 I agree to be audio recorded

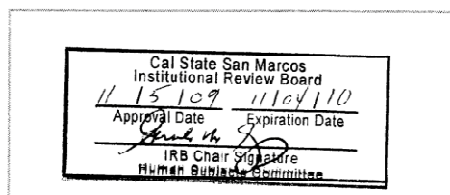
I agree to be video recorded

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

  
 Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX F

### First Focus Group Questions for Students

1. Have you visited the Cross-Cultural Center?
  - a. If no, do you plan to visit the Cross-Cultural Center? Why? Why not?
    - i. What would motivate you to visit the Cross-Cultural Center?
  - b. If yes, how often do you frequent the Cross-Cultural Center?
    - i. What influences you to visit the center?
    - ii. What is the staff influence on your interest in visiting the center?
2. Where on campus would you call a *home away from home*?
  - a. How does the university staff contribute to the home away from home environment?
3. When you walk into the Cross-Cultural Center, what do you think/feel?
4. How will Cross-Cultural Center programs or your involvement in the Center influence your decision to get involved with student organizations, athletics, or other co-curricular involvement?
5. How has the Cross-Cultural Center influenced your transition to CSU San Marcos?
  - a. How has the staff influenced your transition to CSUSM?
6. Do any of you have any other thoughts about the Cross-Cultural Center, Center staff, or additional comments regarding any previous or unasked questions?
7. Follow-up questions. Ask any questions that spur from answers provided by the participants from the above questions.

## APPENDIX G

### Second Focus Group Questions for Students

1. Please tell us a story in which you felt the most alive or energetic in the Cross-Cultural Center?
2. Please tell us about a time when a Cross-Cultural Center staff person helped you feel like a valued member of the community.
3. Please tell us about a time when you felt needed or appreciated in the Cross-Cultural Center.
4. Please tell us a story in which you felt that the Cross-Cultural Center staff showed interest in you or cared about you.
5. What is the impact of the Cross-Cultural Center on you as a student at CSU San Marcos?
6. Do any of you have any other thoughts about the Cross-Cultural Center, Center staff, or additional comments regarding any previous or unasked questions?
7. Follow-up questions. Ask any questions that spur from answers provided by the participants from the above questions.



## APPENDIX H

### Protocol for Staff

Good evening. Thank you for participating in this interview/focus group. My name is Greg Toya and I am the Associate Dean of Students and a doctoral student in the joint Educational Leadership doctoral program at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego.

I have invited you to seek your help in examining the influence of cross-cultural centers with feelings of *mattering* and *sense of belonging*. Your participation this evening is completely voluntary and will not in any way affect you or your standing as a student or staff member and you may feel free to leave the interview at any point.

With your permission, the interview will be video and audio recorded. This will help me to retain your ideas more accurately for future research analysis. Your interview and written responses will be kept confidential and available only to the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor for analysis purposes.

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time. If the length of the interview is inconvenient for you, you may stop the interview at any time without any consequence to you. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate in the study. Are there any questions before we begin the interview?

I have **about 8-10** questions and some possible follow-up questions to ask you. Please feel free to individually answer any and/or all questions. Please let me know if you would like any questions repeated.

The whole process will take about 90 minutes.

If you wish to continue participation, please review and sign the consent form. (Provide staff with consent form).

Thank you for completing the consent forms. Next, I am requesting that you please complete the demographics form. (Provide staff with demographics form). Thank you.

APPENDIX I  
Demographics Form for Staff

**Demographics - Staff and student staff**

Please indicate the following:

Date:

Gender Identity:

Ethnic Identity:

Years and months of work in the Center:

If you are a student, please indicate:

University class standing (e.g. first year):

Highest Parental level of education:

Family Income:

Social Economic Status (circle one):

Low

Middle

Upper Middle

Upper

Your letter for this study (to be given at the interview):

## APPENDIX J

### Consent Form for Staff



#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

##### Invitation to Participate

Gregory J. Toya, an administrator at California State University San Marcos and a graduate student researcher in the CSUSM/UC San Diego Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, is conducting a study on cross-cultural centers. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a staff member or student staff member at the Cross-Cultural Center.

##### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of cross-cultural centers on the sense of belonging and mattering for underserved students.

##### Description of Procedures

You will participate in an interview. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes. With your permission the interview will be audio and video recorded. The interviews will take place in a private room on campus.

##### Demographics Form and Interview Questions

Please review the attached Demographics form. If you are a student staff, you will be asked to disclose personal information such as GPA, SAT scores, and family socioeconomic status. Your demographic information will be used to verify your inclusion in the study. In addition, demographic information may yield themes related to the study's constructs (sense of belonging and mattering). There will be approximately eight questions for each interview with the possibility of some follow-up questions. Follow-up questions will clarify or further your responses to the original eight questions. The topic of the interview questions will be about the Cross-Cultural Center, the Center staff, sense of belonging, and mattering.

##### Risks and Inconveniences

There are minimal risks attached to this study. With the constructs of mattering and sense of belonging, positive physical and psychological responses should transpire. However, the following potential risks may produce a physical or psychological response from you:

- Time. The interview is approximately 90 minutes.
- Social identity disclosure. You will be asked to disclose personal information about your income, gender identity and other demographic information.
- Coercion. You may feel coerced into participating with the study. You may experience discomfort or an obligation to participate in the study if a staff member or administrator recruited you for the study.
- Interview and/or Demographics form questions. Discussing your social identities and experiences with the Center may elicit physical and psychological responses.
- Audio and Video recording. The recording of interviews may cause concern about confidentiality.
- Identity disclosure. In disclosing personal information and Center experiences, you may worry about being identified in the study.
- Interview transcription service. Utilization of a professional transcription service may cause concern for confidentiality.

##### Safeguards, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Nature

The following safeguards address the aforementioned potential risks and inconveniences:

- Time. The researcher will clearly state the amount of participation time for the study before and during the research process. The researcher will monitor the time during the interview process. If the allocated time has expired and the interview is still occurring, the researcher will stress the voluntary nature of staying beyond the anticipated allocated time to complete the interview. If the lengths of the interviews are inconvenient for you, you may stop participating in the interview at any time without any consequence to you. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate.
- Social identity disclosure, identity disclosure, interview and demographics form questions, and audio and video recording confidentiality. Interview responses will be kept confidential and available only to the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor for analysis purposes. Interview recordings will be locked in a safe place. Only the researcher and researcher's faculty advisor will analyze the information provided by you and other participants. Interview responses will not be linked to your name or address. We do this to ensure your responses remain confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any point or may decline to answer any question. You may individually answer any and/or all questions. There will no consequences for not answering any of the questions.
- Coercion. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not in any way affect you or your standing as a student or staff member. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time. There are no consequences of any kind if you decide not to participate in the study.
- Professional transcription service. The professional transcription service will not receive participant name, address, or any other private form of identification.

### Benefits

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely benefit Cal State San Marcos and University of California, San Diego students in the future. However, sharing your stories of your experiences with the Cross-Cultural Center should be an enjoyable and informative experience.

### Questions

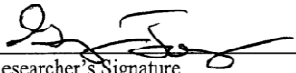
If you have any questions about this study I will be happy to answer them now. If you have any questions in the future, please contact the researcher, Greg Toya, Dean of Students Office, 3600 Craven Hall, 760-750-4935, [gtoya@csusm.edu](mailto:gtoya@csusm.edu) or the researcher's advisor/professor, Dr. Lorri Santamaria at (760) 750-8520.


- I agree to participate in this research study       I agree to be video recorded  
 I agree to be audio recorded

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

  
 Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Cal State San Marcos Institutional Review Board	
Approval Date 11/15/09	Expiration Date 11/14/10
IRB Chair Signature 	
Human Subjects Committee	

## APPENDIX K

### Focus Group Questions for Student Staff

1. What is the purpose of the Cross-Cultural Center and how do you realize this purpose?
2. What is the most rewarding aspect of being a Cross-Cultural Center staff member?
3. Please tell me a story in which you felt the most alive or energetic in the Cross-Cultural Center.
4. Tell me how you, as a Center staff member, pay attention or show that you care about students in the Center.
5. Please tell me a story about how you, as a Center staff member, made a student feel like a valuable member of the community?
6. Think about a time when you felt your efforts in the Center or at a Center event was appreciated. Please describe why you felt appreciated.
7. Please tell me a story in which you were proud to be a Center staff member.
8. As a Center staff member, how do you impact student's lives in the Center and the institution?
9. Do any of you have any other thoughts about the Cross-Cultural Center, Center staff, or additional comments regarding any previous or unasked questions?

## APPENDIX L

### Interview Questions for Staff

1. What is the purpose of the Cross-Cultural Center and how do you realize this purpose?
2. What is the most rewarding aspect of being a Cross-Cultural Center staff member?
3. Tell me how you, as a Center staff member, pay attention or show that you care about students in the Center.
4. Please tell me a story about how you, as a Center staff member, made a student feel like a valuable member of the community
5. Think about a time when you felt your efforts in the Center or at a Center event was appreciated. Please describe why you felt appreciated.
6. Please tell me a story in which you were proud to be a Center staff member
7. As a Center staff member, how do you impact student's lives in the Center and the institution?
8. What theories inform your practice with students and student staff associated with the Center?
9. Please tell me about a time when you applied theory(ies) to students and/or student staff and how your work impacted the student(s).
10. Do any of you have any other thoughts about the Cross-Cultural Center, Center staff, or additional comments regarding any previous or unasked questions?

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